



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 9 MAY 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	05/09 Sri Lanka PM resigns amid protests
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-sri-lanka-indian-ocean-ad2724840cc42f4556797ad868559fae
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned Monday following weeks of protests demanding that he and his brother, the president, step down over the country's worst economic crisis in decades, an official said.</p> <p>An aide to the prime minister, Wijayananda Herath, confirmed that Rajapaksa submitted a letter of resignation to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. There was no immediate official confirmation from the president's office.</p> <p>The resignation comes after authorities deployed armed troops in the capital, Colombo, on Monday following an attack earlier in the day by government supporters on protesters who have been camped outside the offices of the president and prime minister.</p> <p>The Indian Ocean island nation is on the brink of bankruptcy and has suspended payments on its foreign loans. Its economic woes have brought on a political crisis, with the government facing widespread protests and a no-confidence motion in Parliament. Trade unions also called Monday for a general strike until the president and the rest of his ruling family leave.</p> <p>The resignation of the prime minister means that the entire Cabinet is dissolved.</p> <p>Supporters of the prime minister rallied inside his office earlier Monday, urging him to ignore the protesters' demand to step down. They then went to the front of the office where protesters have been demonstrating for several days. Television channel Sirasa showed government supporters attacking protesters with clubs and iron bars, demolishing and then burning their tents.</p> <p>After the attack, hundreds of armed soldiers were deployed in capital, as the protesters accused police of not preventing the attack despite using tear gas and water cannons on protesters as recently as Friday.</p> <p>Sirasa TV showed government lawmaker Sanath Nishantha among the government supporters who attacked the protesters.</p> <p>At the main hospital in Colombo, 23 people were admitted with non-critical injuries, an official said on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to speak to the media.</p> <p>The attack came as protesters marked their 31st day outside the president's and prime minister's offices demanding that they and other powerful Rajapaksa family members quit. Similar protests have spread to other locations, with people setting up camps in other towns across the country.</p>

Three other Rajapaksas out of the five who were lawmakers stepped down from their Cabinet posts in April.

For several months, Sri Lankans have endured long lines to buy fuel, cooking gas, food and medicine, most of which come from abroad. Shortages of hard currency have also hindered imports of raw materials for manufacturing and worsened inflation, which surged to 18.7% in March.

People blocked main roads to demand gas and fuel. On Sunday, television channel Hiru showed people in some areas fighting over fuel.

Sri Lanka was due to pay \$7 billion of its foreign debt this year out of nearly \$25 billion it must pay by 2026. Its total foreign debt is \$51 billion.

Sri Lanka's finance minister announced earlier this week that the country's usable foreign reserves have plummeted below \$50 million.

As oil prices soar during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Sri Lanka's fuel stocks are running out. Authorities have announced countrywide power cuts will increase to about four a day because they can't supply enough fuel to power generating stations.

Protesters have crowded the streets since March, maintaining that President Rajapaksa and his family — who have dominated nearly every aspect of life in Sri Lanka for most of the last 20 years — are responsible for the crisis.

On Friday, President Rajapaksa declared a state of emergency, which empowers him to authorize detentions, property seizure and search of any premises. He can also change or suspend any law in the interests of public security and for the maintenance of essential supplies. Diplomats and rights groups have expressed concern over the move.

Sri Lanka has been holding talks with the International Monetary Fund to get an immediate funding facility as well as a long-term rescue plan but was told its progress would depend on negotiations on debt restructuring with creditors.

Any long-term plan would take at least six months to get underway.

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HEADLINE	05/09 Grim Covid warning: virus continues evolve
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/09/politics/white-house-100-million-covid-infections-projection-what-matters/index.html
GIST	<p>Washington (CNN)"You don't make the timeline, the virus makes the timeline."</p> <p>That was Dr. Anthony Fauci's message for an anxious nation when the novel coronavirus first began to spread across the US. More than two years later, his words have new relevance in the face of a disturbing warning from the White House.</p> <p>CNN's Kaitlan Collins reports: <i>The Biden administration is issuing a new warning that the US could potentially see 100 million Covid-19 infections this fall and winter, as officials publicly stress the need for more funding from Congress to prepare the nation.</i></p> <p><i>The projection of 100 million potential infections is an estimate based on a range of outside models that are being closely tracked by the administration and would include both the fall and winter, a senior administration official told CNN. Officials say this estimate is based on an underlying assumption of no additional resources or extra mitigation measures being taken, including new Covid-19 funding from Congress, or dramatic new variants.</i></p>

Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House Covid-19 response coordinator, confirmed the warning during an interview on [ABC News](#) Sunday, but stressed that "whether that happens or not is largely up to us as a country."

"We're looking at a range of models, both internal and external models, and what they're predicting is that if we don't get ahead of this thing, we're going to have a lot of waning immunity, this virus continues to evolve, and we may see a pretty sizable wave of infections, hospitalizations and deaths this fall and winter," Jha said.

Already, cases of Covid-19 are rising again. Infections have increased by more than 50% compared with the previous week in at least eight states. Parts of New York have moved into the "[high](#)" designation of Covid-19 community level, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention metrics.

But could the virus really infect 100 million Americans this fall and winter? We asked [Dr. Syra Madad](#), an epidemiologist at NYC Health + Hospitals, about the White House's warning and what it might mean for you. Our conversation, conducted over the phone and lightly edited for flow and brevity, is below.

WHAT MATTERS: *What do you make of this warning from the White House?*

MADAD: I think it's an extremely important warning that everybody in the United States, whether you're unvaccinated or vaccinated and boosted, should certainly take heed of because we've been in this rodeo before and we know what to do.

We have the tools and resources to protect ourselves and protect those around us. It's important that people are aware that the risk level around them is increasing. And so there are things that you can do to reduce your risk of getting infected, and certainly having a severe outcome.

When we talk about severe outcome, we know that the Covid-19 vaccines are working and holding up really well against the most severe outcomes, which is hospitalization, ICU-level care and death. At the same time, we want to make sure that there's also funding in place where pharmaceutical companies can invest in [bivalent, multivalent Covid-19 vaccines](#).

WHAT MATTERS: *Officials say the White House estimate is based on an underlying assumption of no additional resources or extra mitigation measures being taken. It sounds like you agree that [additional resources](#) would make a big difference?*

MADAD: Oh, absolutely. I think the best part about these predictions is that they are predictions at the end of the day. There are models that are projecting what's going to happen in the future, and we know that we have the resources and tools to change that future.

We can prevent -- I would say by and large -- that number, that amount of people getting infected. And I think that there's a couple of questions and probably points of clarification that I'll make on that 100 million number itself.

It's unclear where they got that particular ballpark number of infections from -- one can only predict it's probably a combination of waning immunity in addition to obviously the Americans that haven't even gotten fully vaccinated. We still have millions of Americans that have only had one dose. We have millions of Americans that haven't even gotten one dose. And so it's a combination of all of those factors, along with those that are immunocompromised.

What's important is that there's transparency where this number is coming from. I just laid out some of the factors that are probably going into this number, but it's important that we do understand what are the factors that are coming into play in this model.

WHAT MATTERS: *Most of the US is [fully vaccinated](#), and a lot of people are exhausted from the last two years. How do you get people to pay attention to warnings at this point in the pandemic?*

MADAD: It's a great question, and we know pandemic fatigue is real and it has already set in here in the United States. We certainly are out of the acute phase of the pandemic, meaning that it's not red sirens, even though we know obviously hundreds of Americans are still, unfortunately, dying every day, and thousands of Americans are still getting infected every day. And we know that's certainly an underestimate.

But because this virus and this disease is much more manageable because of the tools that we have, people are much more complacent. And I understand that; we are going onto year three. People want to go back to enjoying the life that they knew before this pandemic.

At the same time, I think it's just important that people realize we are still in a pandemic. As much as we don't want to be in one, that is the reality. And it's not just shaped by what's happening here in the United States. It's also shaped by what is happening around the world. And we're seeing more and more of these subvariants pop up both here in the US as well as around the world. It's just important that people realize that it's not over until it's over all around the world.

We need to just continue to be cautious. I think that we can do all the things that we love doing, but doing so in a safer manner, knowing that there's much more virus in the community.

I think really understanding it from the standpoint of: You shouldn't want to get infected. You shouldn't want to get sick, even if it's something that's manageable. For me, I think it's also the risk of long Covid. I'm not necessarily afraid of getting infected with the virus, even though I am still avoiding it. I am still masking in large indoor gatherings because I just don't want to get sick. I am actually afraid of long Covid. I don't know what the repercussions will look like in the long term.

WHAT MATTERS: *What are the [best metrics](#) for people to pay attention to?*

MADAD: So I would look at wastewater surveillance, which is an early indicator of telling you there's something brewing in the community and cases are rising.

I would also continue to look at the CDC's transmission level map. That kind of gives a good indication of where transmission levels are in your given community. And we know many places in the US are getting into that medium level of Covid-19 transmission, certainly here in New York City.

I still would want to know: Are hospitalization rates going up in my given community? Would there be a hospital available to me in the off chance I do get infected and I require hospitalization? But that's more of a lagging indicator.

WHAT MATTERS: *Anything else you'd like to add?*

MADAD: The White House is in a very tough position. They are fighting for more funding. They're making it very transparent that they are very concerned. They want to make sure that people understand that this is no joke.

That 100 million number is a very large number, and so it's really important that Congress understands that we are still in the pandemic, even though a lot of folks have put the pandemic behind them. You know, we could go back very, very quickly to the state that we were in just a few months ago with Omicron, with significant numbers of Americans getting infected.

We don't want to go back to that state, right? So we need to make sure Congress understands that this is really important for them to continue funding.

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HEADLINE	05/06 Making up 1M deaths: where Covid killed
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/specials/covid-one-million-deaths-nursing-homes-prisons-health-care/index.html

More than 1 million lives have been lost to Covid-19 in the United States.

Approximately 346,000 lives were lost in the pandemic's first year. And even with widespread availability of vaccinations in 2021, an additional 482,000 lives were lost that year, with another 171,000 deaths occurring this year through early May.

The country has lost a significant portion of its elderly population, as well as health care workers, first responders, essential workers and others. Here's a glimpse into some of the groups that make up that 1 million.

Nursing homes

Close quarters filled with elderly residents made conditions in nursing homes prime for the spread of Covid.

More than 150,000 nursing home residents have died of Covid, according to [data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#). In addition, 2,300 nursing home staffers also died. In [February](#), the Kaiser Family Foundation reported more than 200,000 deaths after combining resident and staff fatalities.

Seniors

Older adults are more likely to have pre-existing medical conditions or compromised immune systems, [which make Covid far more deadlier than younger people](#).

Nearly 740,000 seniors died from Covid, or [1 out of every 100 seniors](#) in the country. Seniors account for the vast majority of Covid deaths in the U.S., with about 75 percent of all deaths being people 65 and older, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's despite seniors being among the first people to be vaccinated, and the most vaccinated group when compared to younger people.

Prisons

The coronavirus spread easily at state and federal prisons across the country, where inmates were packed in poorly maintained facilities without the ability to maintain physical distance from one another.

More than 2,800 incarcerated people died of Covid as of May 5, and nearly 300 prison staff members also died, according to data from the COVID Prison Project, an organization of public health scientists.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities hold tens of thousands of people annually. Eight immigrants have died of Covid while in custody, according to a 2020 House Committee report.

Some prisons even released inmates early to limit the spread of Covid.

Meatpacking plants

The true number of cases and deaths at meatpacking and processing facilities is unknown, as many of these workplaces did not require cases to be reported. But at least 59,000 meatpacking workers contracted Covid, with 269 dying in 2020, according to a U.S. House report released in October. The report found that the Covid cases were triple earlier estimates put out by the Food and Environment Reporting Network, a news organization that covers the food industry.

The report found that meatpacking companies failed to safeguard employees' health by continuing to employ practices that led to crowded facilities. The report named five of the largest meatpacking companies including Tyson, which saw 151 employee deaths; JBS, which lost 62 employees; Smithfield, which lost 25 employees and Cargill, which also saw 25 people dying of Covid. Six workers from National Beef also died.

Death of Black People

Covid fatalities were initially higher in communities that traditionally [lacked access to equitable health care](#).

Nearly 142,000 Black people in the U.S. died of Covid, accounting for 14 percent of the country's Covid deaths, according to data from the CDC.

In cities like Chicago, Black residents accounted for almost [70 percent of the deaths](#) in the early months of the pandemic, while making up just 30 percent of the city's population. Similar disparities were found in [Detroit](#), [Philadelphia](#) and [Milwaukee](#).

During the peak of the first omicron wave – in January and February this year – [middle-aged adults were the majority](#) of Covid deaths among Black people.

Deaths among Latinos

The pandemic's impact on Latinos led one global health expert to declare that the coronavirus is causing "[the historic decimation](#)" of the Latino community.

An estimated 160,000 Latinos died of Covid in the U.S., accounting for 16 percent of Covid deaths in the country.

Like Black communities, similar disparities with Covid deaths occurred in cities like Austin, where Latinos accounted for 34 percent of the city's population but half of the Covid cases. In Los Angeles County, the mortality rate for Latinos [rose by 48 percent](#) during the pandemic.

Latino patients were more likely to be hospitalized or die than white patients, according to [one University of California study](#), and in [some cases](#), younger Latinos [represented an outsize portion](#) of Covid deaths when compared to deaths among white people.

Deaths among Asians

About 31,000 Asian people died of Covid in the U.S. as of May 4, according to CDC data. Asians accounted for 3 percent of all deaths in the country.

In the health profession, Filipino Americans make up 4 percent of registered nurses, but [accounted for 25 percent of the registered nurses](#) who died of Covid as of last May, according to the National Nurses United, a nursing union.

In [New York](#) and [San Francisco](#), Asian communities were among the hardest hit when the pandemic started.

Police officers

Police officers were one of the front-line worker groups that did not have the ability to isolate at home.

At least 600 police officers died from Covid as of April, according to the [Officer Down Memorial Page](#), which tracks fallen officers.

Covid was the [leading cause of death](#) for police officers last year.

Health care workers

Health care workers were the first on the front lines of the pandemic – and still are.

About 3,600 health care workers died in 2020, according to [a Guardian and Kaiser Health News investigation](#).

When the pandemic started, health care workers were working nonstop shifts, [often without the proper protective equipment](#) to keep from getting sick themselves.

	The pandemic may have a long-lasting impact on health care professionals who have suffered mental trauma – with nearly 1 in 5 workers calling it quits.
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HEADLINE	05/08 Average gas price jumps \$.15 to \$4.38/gal.
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/average-us-gasoline-price-jumps-15-cents-438-84577311
GIST	<p>CAMARILLO, Calif. -- The average U.S. price of regular-grade gasoline jumped 15 cents over past two weeks to \$4.38 per gallon.</p> <p>Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg of the Lundberg Survey said Sunday that the current price sits just a nickel below the highest average price in history — \$4.43, set on March 11.</p> <p>The average price at the pump is \$1.36 higher than it was one year ago.</p> <p>Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas is in the San Francisco Bay Area, at \$5.85 per gallon. The lowest average is in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at \$3.80 per gallon.</p> <p>According to the survey, the average price of diesel soared 43 cents over two weeks, to \$5.58 a gallon.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Putin blames West, NATO for Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/05/09/Vladimir-Putin-Victory-Day-parade/7601652086135/
GIST	<p>May 9 (UPI) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday blamed NATO and democratic nations for Moscow's war in Ukraine during a speech he gave to mark his nation's victory over Nazi Germany more than 70 years ago.</p> <p>Putin, who is the supreme commander-in-chief of Russia's Armed Forces, attended a military parade of some 11,000 people and 131 military equipment units in Moscow's Red Square to commemorate the 77th anniversary of Victory Day.</p> <p>During his speech to the public, Putin described Western nations as aggressors unwilling to negotiate with him, leading to the war that is now nearing three months old.</p> <p>He said that in December amid his military buildup of some 150,000 troops along Ukraine's border that Russia proposed a security treaty with democratic nations but "NATO countries did not want to hear us, which means that in fact they had completely different plans."</p> <p>He accused the democratic nations of openly preparing to invade "our historical lands" of Donbas and Crimea, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.</p> <p>He also said there was talk in Kyiv of acquiring nuclear weapons and that "the NATO bloc had begun active military development of territories adjacent to us" as causes for the war.</p> <p>"Thus, a threat absolutely unacceptable to us was systematically created directly at our borders," he said. "I repeat, we saw how the military infrastructure was being developed, how hundreds of foreign advisers began to work, there were regular deliveries of the most modern weapons from NATO. The danger grew every day."</p> <p>Putin and Kremlin officials have described the war in Ukraine as a special military operation with the purpose of demilitarizing and denazifying the former Soviet Union nation. The war sparked outrage from democratic nations who have responded with wide-ranging punitive measures, including sanctions, as well as efforts to arm Kyiv in the battle.</p> <p>The Russian president in his speech said with their invasion they "proactively rebuffed aggression."</p>

"It was a forced, timely and only right decision," he said. "The decision of a sovereign, strong, independent country."

Ahead of the speech, Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#) published [a recorded speech](#) of his own, stating on this Victory Day they are in a new fight, one that they will win.

"There is no occupier who can take root in our free land. There is no invader who can rule over our free people," he said. "Sooner or later, we win. Despite the horde, despite Nazism, despite the mixture of the first and the second, which is the currently enemy, we win, because this is our land.

"And soon there will be two Victory Days in Ukraine," he said. "And someone will not have even one left."

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, resulting in the deaths of more than 3,300 Ukrainian civilians and forcing more than 5.8 million to flee the country, according to United Nations data.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Russia attacks Ukraine rail system fail
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/ukraine-rail-system/2022/05/08/id/1068952/
GIST	<p>A salvo of missiles brought the Kremlin's war on Ukraine to Fastiv, a quiet town abounding with flowering cherry trees and set in sweeping farmland hundreds of kilometers from the front lines. The strike on April 28, which injured two people, hit an electrical substation that feeds power to a confluence of railway lines that forms a key hub of networks linking central Europe, Russia, and Asia.</p> <p>The damage quickly was repaired, said Ukrainian officials, and a Reuters visit last week revealed no lingering impact. Trains plied between Kyiv and the southern port of Odesa, disgorging passengers into the station at Fastiv, a town of 45,000 people 75 km (45 miles) south of the capital.</p> <p>Officials said the attack was part of an escalating Russian assault on infrastructure, aimed in part at paralyzing rail deliveries of Western-supplied arms and also reinforcements sustaining Ukrainian forces fighting in the east and south.</p> <p>So far, Moscow's effort has failed, making state-owned Ukrainian Railways a leading symbol of the country's resilience.</p> <p>"The longest delay we've had has been less than an hour," said Oleksandr Kamyshin, 37, a former investment banker who keeps the trains running as the CEO of the railways, Ukraine's largest employer.</p> <p>"They haven't hit a single military train."</p> <p>The Russian defense ministry has said Ukrainian facilities powering the railways have been targeted by missile strikes because trains are used to deliver foreign arms to Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>The rail system is being hit not just because it is critical to military supplies, Ukrainian officials said.</p> <p>Moscow's "goal is to destroy critical infrastructure as much as possible for military, economic and social reasons," Deputy Infrastructure Minister Yuri Vaskov said in an interview.</p> <p>With Russian warships blockading Black Sea ports, downed bridges and checkpoints obstructing roadways, and a fuel crunch snarling trucking, Ukraine's 22,000 km (14,000 miles) of track are the main lifeline of the struggling economy and a passage to the outside world.</p> <p>Trains have evacuated millions of civilians fleeing to safer parts of the country or abroad.</p>

They have begun running small grain shipments to neighboring counties to circumvent Russia's maritime blockade. Ukraine was the world's fourth largest grain exporter in the 2020/21 season and exports disrupted by the war have interrupted global food chains and helped fuel worldwide inflation.

Internally, trains are distributing humanitarian aid and other cargoes. They enabled the restart of the AcelorMittal steel plant, in Kryvyi Rih, by bringing workers in and product out, said Kamyshin. They carry civilian casualties in hospital cars staffed by Doctors Without Borders. Since Russia invaded on Feb. 24, he said, trains have distributed more than 140,000 tonnes of food and will have carried some 1 million kilos of mail for the state postal service by mid-May.

Russian attacks on some of the 1,000 stations have killed scores of civilians, including dozens killed in an attack in April in the station in the eastern city of Kramatorsk.

That has not deterred passengers.

Daily ridership has reached as many as 200,000 passengers, Kamyshin said in an interview on Saturday as he rode a train across a bridge that had been repaired after being badly damaged during Russia's failed advance on Kyiv from the suburb of Irpin.

Nor have the railway's 230,000 personnel stayed home even though 122 have been killed and 155 others wounded on the job and in their houses, said Kamyshin.

Moscow denies striking civilian targets in what it calls a "special military operation" to disarm Ukraine and rid it of what it calls anti-Russian nationalism fomented by the West. Ukraine and the West say Russia launched an unprovoked war of aggression.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the assertions of Kamyshin and other Ukrainian officials about their successes keeping the railways going in wartime.

UKRAINE'S 'LIFELINE'

Helena Muskrivska, 56, the Irpin station master, said she worked for the first four days of the Russian assault, helping evacuate some 1,000 people and relaying local developments by landline to Kyiv. She took documents and equipment home when it became too dangerous.

"I was here when the Russians came into the station. I didn't want to see them face to face," said Muskrivska.

A group of current and former U.S. and European railway executives formed the International Support Ukraine Rail Task Force in March to raise money for protective gear, first aid kits and financial aid for railway staff.

"There's a lot of fundraising efforts everywhere for Ukraine, but none of it goes to the railroad," said Jolene Molitoris, a former U.S. Federal Railroad Administration chief who chairs the group. "It is the lifeline of the country."

The group also aims to fund purchases of heavy machinery, rails and other equipment sought by the railways.

Kamyshin said he is racing against the Russian attacks, deploying teams of workers and dispatchers around the clock to fix tracks and reroute trains. "It's all about hours, not about days."

He and top aides constantly move, taking trains to inspect damage and repairs around Ukraine, he said, adding: "Once they break it, we fix it."

	Kamyshin said his top priority is redirecting grain exports from Ukraine's southern ports to Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states to help revive the economy. He said Russia would remain a threat even after what he called its inevitable defeat. "This crazy neighbor will stay with us," he said. "No one knows when they will come again."
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HEADLINE	05/08 US visa bans: Bucha attackers
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-ukraine-bucha/2022/05/08/id/1068957/
GIST	<p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Sunday that new U.S. visa bans on more than 2,600 Russian and Belarusian military officials included personnel believed to have operated in Bucha, a town outside of Kyiv where Russian forces are accused of executing residents.</p> <p>Announcing a new policy of visa restrictions targeting Russian and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, the State Department said it imposed bans on 2,596 members of the Russian military and 13 Belarusian military officials. The visa bans apply to the officials and their immediate family members.</p> <p>"Included among this group are personnel who reportedly took part in Russian military activities in Bucha, the horrors of which have shocked the world," Blinken said in a statement.</p> <p>Reuters recently published a special report including new details about the forces who occupied Bucha.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have said hundreds of civilians have been found dead after Russian troops left the town. Russian officials have said the killings were faked.</p> <p>The visa bans came amid a raft of new U.S. sanctions after President Joe Biden and other Group of Seven leaders met virtually with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Sunday and pledged to further isolate Russia and its economy.</p> <p>The State Department also blacklisted eight Russian maritime-related companies and 69 vessels, which would now appear of a U.S. Treasury Department sanctions list that blocks them from doing business in the United States or with U.S. persons.</p> <p>The companies targeted include the Russian Ministry of Defense's shipping company and Fertoing, a specialized marine engineering company that produces remotely operated subsea equipment but would now be blocked from accessing U.S. technologies, Blinken said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 No end in sight for Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-germany-moscow-f3e25a88fb947ada8f2710f664fd3604
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin used a major patriotic holiday Monday to again justify his war in Ukraine but did not declare even a limited victory or signal where the conflict was headed, as his forces continued to pummel targets across the country with few signs of significant progress.</p> <p>The Russian leader oversaw a Victory Day parade on Red Square, with troops marching in formation, military hardware on display, and a brass band blaring to mark the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany. But his much-anticipated speech offered no new insights to how he intended to salvage the grinding war — and instead stuck to allegations that Ukraine posed a threat to Russia, even though Moscow's nuclear-armed forces are far superior in numbers and firepower.</p> <p>"The danger was rising by the day," he said as he surveyed the troops. "Russia has given a pre-emptive response to aggression. It was a forced, timely and the only correct decision."</p>

Ukrainian leaders and their Western backers have often rejected claims that Kyiv posed any threat to its giant neighbor.

Many analysts had suggested Putin might use his speech to declare some sort of limited victory — potentially in the besieged strategic port city of Mariupol — as he looks for an exit from the conflict that has unleashed punishing sanctions from the West and strained Russia's resources. Others suggested he might order a nationwide mobilization to beef up the depleted ranks for an extended conflict.

There was “nothing significant in Putin's speech today, but he will need to make a decision regarding mobilization in the coming weeks,” wrote Rob Lee, a senior fellow at the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, on Twitter.

As Putin laid a wreath in Moscow, air raid sirens echoed again in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared in his own Victory Day address that his country would eventually defeat the Russians.

“Very soon there will be two Victory Days in Ukraine,” he said in a video released to mark the holiday. “We have never fought against anyone. We always fight for ourselves. ... We are fighting for freedom for our children, and therefore we will win.”

An adviser to Zelenskyy also pushed back against the idea that Ukraine and its Western allies posed any threat to Russia.

Mykhailo Podolyak wrote on Twitter that “NATO countries were not going to attack Russia. Ukraine did not plan to attack Crimea,” which Russia seized in 2014.

The Ukrainian military's General Staff warned Monday of a high probability of missile strikes on the holiday, and Britain's Defense Ministry said in its daily assessment Russian forces could increasingly subject Ukrainian towns and cities to “intense and indiscriminate bombardments with little or no regard for civilian casualties” as they run short of precision-guided munitions.

In fact, more than 60 people were feared dead after a Russian bomb flattened a Ukrainian school being used as a shelter in Bilohorivka, an eastern village, Ukrainian officials said.

With the war now in its 11th week, battles were being waged on multiple fronts, but Russia was perhaps closest to victory in Mariupol, where Ukrainian fighters are making a last stand at a sprawling steel mill in a battle that has highlighted some of the worst suffering of the war.

The complete capture of Mariupol would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, allow Russia to complete a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, and free troops up for fighting elsewhere in the Donbas, which is now Putin's stated focus following his failure to seize the capital in the early days of the conflict. The fall of the city would provide a much-needed symbolic victory for Russia.

Russian forces pounded away over the weekend at the plant, where as many as 2,000 Ukrainian fighters are estimated to be holding out.

“We are under constant shelling,” said Capt. Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of the Ukrainian Azov Regiment, which held the mill.

Lt. Ilyia Samoilenko, another regiment member, said a couple hundred wounded soldiers were inside. He declined to say how many able-bodied fighters remained. He said fighters had to dig by hand to free people from bunkers that collapsed under shelling.

For weeks, hundreds of civilians also took shelter with the fighters at the plant, but the last were evacuated Saturday. In a convoy led by the United Nations and international Red Cross, they arrived Sunday night in

Zaporizhzhia, the first major Ukrainian city beyond the frontlines. They spoke of constant shelling, dwindling food, ubiquitous mold — and using hand sanitizer for cooking fuel.

The Ukrainian military warned Russian troops were seizing “personal documents from the local population without good reason” in parts of the Zaporizhzhia region that they controlled — allegedly as a way to force residents to join in Victory Day commemorations.

As a stiffer than expected Ukrainian resistance, bolstered by Western arms, has bogged down Russian forces, Moscow scaled back its war aims. It is now pressing offensives in some areas of southern Ukraine and the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for years. But they still have struggled to make significant strides, and Ukrainian and Russian forces have fought village by village in recent weeks.

A Ukrainian counteroffensive in the northeast near Kharkiv, outside of the Donbas but key to offensive there, was making “significant progress,” according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

However, Rodion Miroshnik, a pro-Kremlin official in the Luhansk region of the Donbas, said Moscow-backed separatist forces and Russian troops had captured most of Popasna, an embattled city that saw two months of fierce fighting.

The southern Black Sea port of Odesa has also seen increased fighting recently, and Ukrainian officials said Russia fired four cruise missiles targeting the city Monday from Crimea. It said no civilians were wounded in the attack, but did not elaborate on what was struck.

“The enemy continues to destroy the infrastructure of the region and exert psychological pressure on the civilian population,” the command said. “There is a very high probability of continued missile attacks in the region.”

As they struggle to make gain, Russian forces have repeatedly shelled cities and towns indiscriminately. About 90 people were sheltering in the school basement in Bilohorivka when it was attacked Saturday. Emergency crews found two bodies and rescued 30 people, but “most likely all 60 people who remain under the rubble are now dead,” Serhiy Haidai, governor of Luhansk province, wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

Ukraine’s military also warned some 19 Russian battalion tactical groups were stationed just across the border in Russia’s Belgorod region. Those groups likely consist of some 15,200 troops with tanks, missile batteries and other weaponry.

As Victory Day turned attention toward Putin, Western leaders showed new signs of support for Ukraine.

The Group of Seven leading industrial democracies pledged Sunday to ban or phase out imports of Russian oil.

The United States, meanwhile, announced new sanctions, cutting off Western advertising from Russia’s three biggest TV stations, banning U.S. accounting and consulting firms from providing services, and cutting off Russia’s industrial sector from wood products, industrial engines, boilers and bulldozers.

U.S. first lady Jill Biden met Sunday with her Ukrainian counterpart. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau raised his country’s flag at its embassy in Kyiv. And U2’s Bono, alongside bandmate The Edge, performed in a Kyiv subway station that had been used as a bomb shelter, singing the 1960s song “Stand by Me.”

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HEADLINE	05/08 How long will inflation last?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/08/investing/stocks-week-ahead/index.html

New York (CNN Business) The Federal Reserve's favorite inflation-related adjective used to be transitory, as in: Inflation is transitory and price increases should be temporary.

That is no longer the case. [Inflation rates have been increasing](#) sharply since August 2021 and have been out of the normal 2%-to-4% range for a full year. The Consumer Price Index [rose 8.5% for the year](#) ending in March, a rate that hadn't been seen since December of 1981.

So the central bank has broken up with "transitory" and set its eyes on a new inflation-modifying term: entrenched.

"It's our job to make sure that inflation of that unpleasant high nature doesn't get entrenched in the economy," [said Fed Chair Jerome Powell](#) last Wednesday, just after he announced a half-point interest rate hike to combat inflation.

It's unclear what exactly entrenched inflation looks like or how we'll know if we've reached it. The Fed has given very little guidance in general on how long they predict it will take for their interest hikes to lower inflation. "It's a very difficult environment to try to give forward guidance 60, 90 days in advance," said Powell last week. "There are just so many things that can happen in the economy and around the world."

There's nothing investors hate more than uncertainty, and as increasing rates pummel US markets, they want more guidance. Americans, who have been hard-hit by [rising gas](#) and [food prices](#) also want to know when they can finally feel some relief, especially if the Fed's rate hikes risk [dragging the economy into a recession](#).

Looking back: Looking to the past could offer some insight: Although prices have been relatively stable over the past four decades, large swings were not uncommon before the early 1980s.

History ([and Fed data](#)) show that the driver of inflation is important in predicting when rates will finally decrease: Prices grew at very rapid rates during World War I and World War II as a result of war-time constraints, but fell again when peacetime resumed.

In the 1970s, the US experienced its longest stretch of heightened inflation. President Richard Nixon removed the dollar from the gold standard and two surges in oil prices pushed inflation rates to 12.3% by late 1974. The Fed began practicing "stop-go" monetary policy, raising benchmark rates as high as 16% and then quickly dropped them again, leading to a cycle in which increased interest rates weren't sustained for long enough to end inflation or increase growth.

By the late 1970s, Federal Reserve Chair Paul Volcker took over and ended that policy. He raised rates and kept them high until inflation came down, throwing the US into recession (its second of the decade) but finally permanently lowering inflation rates, where they remained for the next 40 years.

"I have tremendous admiration for [Volcker]." said Powell last week, when asked about his policy changes. "He had the courage to do what he thought was the right thing."

Looking ahead: So will it take nearly 20 years and two recessions to get us back to normal? Powell certainly doesn't think so. The economy is strong and the unemployment data looks nothing like it did in the 1970s, Powell said. Many believe that we've already [reached an inflationary peak](#) and numbers are beginning to flatten.

Analysts often speak of the fears of 1970s stagflation and compare our current situations, but today's inflation is caused by a mixture of global crisis, supply chain disruptions and growth in consumer demand after Covid-lockdowns shut down the economy.

"The inflationary period after World War II is likely a better comparison for the current economic situation than the 1970s and suggests that inflation could quickly decline once supply chains are fully online and

pent-up demand levels off," wrote the White House Council of Economic Advisers [in a recent white paper](#).

Still, as growth slows and markets drop, the two S phrases — stagflation and sticky inflation — get thrown around with increasing frequency.

Some investors think the answer is in the middle.

"We expect US inflation to slow over the next two years, but the progress will be very uneven," wrote Bank Of America analysts in a recent note. "There is tentative evidence of an easing of supply chain challenges and we expect 'two steps forward, one step back' process in the next year." But this won't be a decade-long struggle, they predict. Prices should begin to ease by 2023.

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HEADLINE	05/09 Putin speech Victory Day: escalate war?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/09/europe/russia-victory-day-ukraine-snap-analysis-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Global leaders and defense officials had spent weeks speculating what Russian President Vladimir Putin might reveal about his Ukraine plans in a speech at Russia's Victory Day commemorations Monday. They'll have to keep guessing -- the leader offered few clues on the direction of the conflict.</p> <p>UK defense chief Ben Wallace had suggested that Putin may use this historic day to escalate his so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine and declare an outright war. Even if that had been Putin's plan, he was unlikely to follow through after Wallace's comments, not wanting to appear to his Western foes as such an easy nut to crack.</p> <p>Instead, the Russian president used his speech to blend history with the present, banking on Russian nationalism on its most patriotic of holidays to justify his war.</p> <p>In his reverence for Soviet war heroes who helped defeat Nazi Germany in World War II -- the reason Russia celebrates Victory Day -- Putin referred to new Nazi threats in Ukraine, repeating his baseless justification for the invasion as an operation to "denazify" the nation.</p> <p>In reference to the threat of NATO troops in Europe, Putin said: "Everything indicated that a clash with neo-Nazis, Banderites [Ukrainian nationalists], on whom the United States and their younger partners counted on, would be inevitable."</p> <p>"Danger was increasing every day. Russia repelled this aggression in a preventative way. This was the only correct decision, and it was a timely decision. The decision of an independent, sovereign and powerful nation," he said.</p> <p>Putin had few other options than to use his speech to keep selling his war to his own people. He has so few successes in Ukraine to brag of, after all. All he can do now is to keep Russians on his side as they suffer the economic hardship of crippling sanctions and international isolationism.</p> <p>The question now is whether Putin will use this day -- or this week even -- to escalate the war in other ways.</p> <p>There are growing concerns that Russian forces will turn again to standoff weapons -- aerial strikes and long-range missiles, for example -- that can be fired from afar, as they so often do when they are on the backfoot. That's worrying, as those attacks are indiscriminate and tend to cause huge civilian tolls. A bombing of a school in Luhansk, eastern Ukraine, that is feared to have killed at least 60 sheltering people over the weekend is just one example.</p>

	<p>After Russia's failure to take territory in Ukraine's north and around the capital, Kyiv, it's struggling even in the east and south, where it has had a presence through pro-Russian rebels for years. The possibility that Russia may win nothing, or very little, in Ukraine is real.</p> <p>Whether anything changes this Victory Day or not, a new chapter in the war will inevitably need writing soon.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Small drones; Ukraine unprecedented edge
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2022/05/small-drones-are-giving-ukraine-an-unprecedented-edge/
GIST	<p>In the snowy streets of the north Ukrainian town of Trostyanets, the Russian missile system fires rockets every second. Tanks and military vehicles are parked on either side of the blasting artillery system, positioned among houses and near the town's railway system. The weapon is not working alone, though. Hovering tens of meters above it and recording the assault is a Ukrainian drone. The drone isn't a sophisticated military system, but a small, commercial machine that anyone can buy.</p> <p>Since Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine at the end of February, drones of all shapes and sizes have been used by both sides in the conflict. At one end of the scale are large military drones that can be used for aerial surveillance and to attack targets on the ground. In contrast, small commercial drones can be flown by people without any specific training and carried around in a suitcase-sized box. While both types of drones have been used in previous conflicts, the current scale of small, commercial drone use in Ukraine is unprecedented.</p> <p>Drone videos shared and posted to social media depict the brutality of the war and reveal what has happened during battles. Drones have captured fighting in the destroyed Ukrainian city of Bucha, with lines of tanks moving around streets and troops moving alongside them. Commercial drones have helped journalists document the sheer scale of destruction in Kyiv and Mariupol, flying over burnt-out buildings that have been reduced to rubble.</p> <p>Russian troops have been caught on camera allegedly shooting at citizens holding their hands in the air. Drone videos show Ukrainian troops shelling Russian positions, monitoring their movements in real time, and ambushing Russian troops. In one video, a drone spots Russian military vehicles leaving troops behind—they run after the transport and fall in the snow. In another, the drone hovers in the air and records a helicopter being shot down as it flies past.</p> <p>"Drones changed the way the war was supposed to be," says Valerii Iakovenko, the founder of Ukrainian drone company DroneUA. "It is all about intelligence, collecting and transferring data about enemy troops' movements or positionings, correcting artillery fire. It is about counter-saboteurs' actions, and it is of course search-and-rescue operations." Iakovenko estimates that Ukrainian forces are operating more than 6,000 drones for reconnaissance and says these can link up with Elon Musk's Starlink satellite systems to upload footage. "In 2014, drones became the center of attention of intelligence units, but their scale cannot be compared to what we see today," he says. (Russia first began its invasion of Ukraine in 2014 with its annexation of Crimea.)</p> <p>Both Ukraine and Russia have used military drones during the war—and Ukraine received donations of drones from the US. These military drones can often fly at high altitudes for long periods of time and fire upon targets, including ships. However, the use of smaller commercial drones in such high numbers stands out, researchers say. These drones, which can sometimes be flimsy and can't fly far from their operators or stay in the air for long periods, have provided tactical advantages in some cases. (Commercial drones have been used in previous conflicts, for instance in Syria, but not as extensively as in Ukraine.)</p> <p>Civilian drone researcher Faine Greenwood has tracked and logged almost 350 incidents in which consumer drones have been used in Ukraine, with the video footage shared on Twitter, Telegram, YouTube, and other social media. Many of the clips, which Greenwood has also mapped, are recorded by</p>

military forces, but others have been captured by civilians and journalists. The documented incidents are likely to be only a small fraction of the drone usage in Ukraine. Iakovenko says that in addition to collecting footage for possible war crimes, drones are being used to inspect buildings that have been hit and to help restore power supplies that have been damaged or knocked out.

“You get cheap airborne surveillance, or even strike capabilities, by using these,” says Ulrike Franke, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations who has studied the use of drones in war. The drones allow troops on the ground to immediately surveil forces around them, retarget weapons, and take action that could stop enemy advances or save lives. “You have individuals or small militia groups that all of a sudden have their own airborne surveillance capability—that’s something you wouldn’t have had 10 years ago. There certainly have been tactical advances and tactical victories because of that.”

Beyond providing direct surveillance that can contribute to intelligence, the videos being captured by consumer drones could contribute to accountability after the war ends. “This is one of the first cases we have had where drones have collected so much really applicable information for war crimes investigations against civilians,” Greenwood says. Although there are questions about what kinds of footage will be admissible in trials, Greenwood and others are backing up and saving video from drones in Ukraine.

Chief among the commercial drones being used in Ukraine are those from Chinese firm DJI, particularly its [Mavic line of devices](#). Its consumer drones are considered to be some of the easiest to purchase and fly. Both Ukrainian and Russian forces have been seen using the drones, Greenwood says. Early in the war, Ukrainian authorities accused DJI of allowing Russian forces to use its drone detection system to target troops, although the [company strongly denies this and no strong evidence has been presented](#).

At the end of April, DJI announced it was [temporarily suspending sales in both Russia and Ukraine](#). The company has consistently said it doesn’t market its products for military use, and it has [refused to enable modifications that would allow such use](#). “DJI has taken this action not to make a statement about any country, but to make a statement about our principles,” DJI spokesperson Adam Lisberg says. “DJI abhors any use of our drones to cause harm, and we are temporarily suspending sales in these countries in order to help ensure no one uses our drones in combat.”

Despite DJI’s opposition to military uses of its products, the drones have been weaponized during the war. “I don’t think people have expected commercial DJI drones to be used at such scale,” says Samuel Bendett, an advisor with nonprofit research organization CNA who focuses on Russia and unmanned and autonomous military systems. “This raises the question of whether drone proliferation can be stopped altogether in any conflict.” Charities, companies, and individuals have [donated](#) consumer drones from around the world to Ukrainian forces. (Greenwood says they have seen claims that the Russian military is being [supplied with donated drones](#), too. They also point out Telegram messages that claim to show pro-Russian fighters [discussing the use of commercial drones](#)).

While the use of consumer drones in conflicts is not new, the machines are not designed for a hostile environment. “The downside of these drones is that they’re not military-grade,” Bendett says, adding they can be targeted by anti-drone technology designed to take them out of the sky. All the drone specialists we spoke to for this article say they haven’t seen as many incidents of drones being shot out of the sky as they would have expected—particularly by Russian forces.

“Flying a simple commercial drone in conflict puts the operators in danger as well,” Bendett says. Civilians, journalists, and humanitarian workers using drones in Ukraine are being put at greater risk when they fly consumer drones, Greenwood adds. “The big problem with consumer drones and conflict zones, which humanitarian aid workers are very conscious of, is that you can’t tell them apart; they look exactly the same.” A consumer drone being flown by a civilian appears no different from the same drone being flown by a soldier.

	This means there are questions about what will happen under humanitarian laws if people flying drones are targeted, Greenwood says. “What happens if an aid worker is flying a drone and people assume it's a drone, it must be being flown by a combatant, and therefore this is a valid target and I'm going to kill it?”
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HEADLINE	05/08 G7 pledge: ban, phase out Russia oil
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/europe/g7-nations-russia-oil.html
GIST	<p>Leaders of the Group of 7 nations pledged during a virtual meeting on Sunday with President Volodymyr Zelensky to ban or phase out Russian oil, aiming to still further erode Russia’s economic standing as it pursues its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The group did not provide details but said in a statement that the plans would be enforced in a “timely and orderly fashion, and in ways that provide time for the world to secure alternative supplies.”</p> <p>Oil bans are a two-edged sword. Oil is a top export for Russia, and Moscow would almost certainly sustain a big economic blow should it be banned, but parts of Europe are heavily dependent on its oil and thus are also vulnerable.</p> <p>The United States, which imported a relatively small amount of energy resources from Russia, has already banned the import of Russian oil and gas.</p> <p>The European Union, which gets about a quarter of its crude oil imports from Russia, has also announced plans for phasing out Russian oil, but is still in talks to formalize the decision. The bloc is too dependent on Russian gas to consider banning it in the short term, but has laid out plans to become progressively independent from it.</p> <p>The G7 also said it would take steps to stop the provision of key services on which Russia depends and to toughen sanctions against the financial elites who support President Vladimir V. Putin, as well as their family members.</p> <p>The White House also announced new sanctions on Sunday against three Russian state television outlets and said it would prohibit Americans from providing accounting or consulting services to anyone in Russia.</p> <p>The Group of 7, which includes some of the world’s biggest economies, said that member nations — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States — would also continue to provide billions of dollars in military aid and intelligence to Ukraine, which has helped the country thwart Russian forces.</p> <p>During the meeting Sunday, Mr. Zelensky pleaded Ukraine’s case with the world leaders, saying his ultimate goal was to force the full withdrawal of Russia’s army.</p> <p>The G7, in its statement, said member nations had assured Mr. Zelensky of their “continued readiness to undertake further commitments to help Ukraine secure its free and democratic future.”</p> <p>The call took place on the day the G7 leaders commemorate the end of the Second World War and as Russia prepared for its annual celebration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.</p> <p>“We remain united in our resolve that President Putin must not win his war against Ukraine,” the G7 statement said. “We owe it to the memory of all those who fought for freedom in the Second World War.”</p> <p>The actions of Mr. Putin, it said, “bring shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people.”</p>

	Ahead of the call, the United Kingdom said it would offer an additional 1.3 billion pounds (about 1.6 billion dollars) in aid and military support to Ukraine. The new funding almost doubles the existing 1.5 billion pounds in support.
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HEADLINE	05/08 Brazil buys Russian fertilizer
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/americas/brazil-russian-fertilizer-sanctions.html
GIST	<p>RIO DE JANEIRO — When the first Russian missiles struck Ukraine, the reverberations were felt 6,500 miles away, on the vast Brazilian farms that grow much of the world’s soybeans.</p> <p>Russia supplies a quarter of Brazil’s fertilizers, and sanctions meant to punish Moscow for its invasion threatened to trap the crucial commodity from being exported. That posed a danger not only to the Brazilian economy, but also to the world’s ability to feed itself.</p> <p>Within days, Brazilian officials warned farmers to cut back on a critical fertilizer, and experts forecast that the country — one of the largest exporters of corn, soybeans, sugar and coffee — had just three months before it ran out.</p> <p>Now, two months later, Brazil is replenishing its fertilizer stockpiles — with help from Russia. Much like the Russian gas that has been flowing through pipelines into Europe, hundreds of thousands of tons of Russian fertilizer have arrived in Brazil since the invasion. And more is on its way.</p> <p>Brazil scrambled to buy Russian fertilizer just ahead of the invasion to keep shipments coming early in the war. And though the purchase of Russian fertilizer itself has not been banned, Brazilian buyers have had to contend with sanctions on Russian banks and logistical hurdles that experts feared would still cut off trade.</p> <p>But buyers have managed to find ways around those obstacles, including using a Russian bank excluded from sanctions and getting an assist from Citigroup in New York.</p> <p>The shipments are good news for global food supplies and prices, but they are bad news for the West’s strategy to isolate Russia economically in a bid to weaken President Vladimir V. Putin’s resolve in Ukraine.</p> <p>Western sanctions have frozen much of Russia’s financial assets, said Edward Fishman, a former Obama administration official who helped design past measures against Russia and Iran. “What they haven’t frozen are the flows into the economy, primarily through the sale of commodities.”</p> <p>“Until that gap is closed,” he added, “it lengthens Putin’s runway.”</p> <p>Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has created a dilemma for nations and corporations that pits values against economics. Much of the world agrees that Russia should be punished for its invasion of Ukraine, but government officials and business leaders are grappling with the economic realities of doing so.</p> <p>The biggest example is Russian oil and gas, a far larger economic lifeline for Mr. Putin than fertilizer. Countries across the world have continued to buy fuel from Russia, while trying to cut off Moscow in other ways.</p> <p>Russian fertilizer presents a similar quandary.</p> <p>Ukraine and Russia are among the world’s largest exporters of wheat, corn and barley, and the war has kept much of those crops bottled up, increasing prices and exacerbating global food shortages.</p> <p>Russia also accounts for roughly 15 percent of the world’s fertilizer exports. Blocking those exports would deprive Mr. Putin of another revenue stream that can fuel Russia’s war against Ukraine. But United</p>

Nations officials and other experts have warned that restrictions on Russian fertilizer would raise prices even more and deplete food supplies.

Facing the prospect of such a crisis, the United States created a carve-out in its sanctions in late March to explicitly allow purchases of Russian food and fertilizer. While financial sanctions are still complicating transactions, American officials have been working to reassure other governments and business leaders — including meeting with government and industry officials in Brazil — that buying Russian fertilizer is not prohibited.

Europe placed a one-year ceiling on imports of certain Russian fertilizers, allowing only 2.6 million tons into the continent in a year — less than half of what Europe imported in 2021.

With some of that fertilizer now reaching farmers in Brazil, economists predict a slow down in recent price hikes and improved crop yields, increasing the chances that farmers can make up some of the food shortages inflicted by Russia's invasion.

"It keeps pricing in check, and that's really important," said Josef Schmidhuber, an economist who has studied the conflict's impact on food for the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. "If Brazil were to scale back next year because of a lack of fertilizer, that would certainly be bad news for a global food crisis."

The biggest buyer of Russian fertilizer is Brazil, which imports about a quarter of all its fertilizer from Russia.

Earlier this year, with Russian troops gathering at the Ukrainian border, President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil posed for photos with Mr. Putin in the Kremlin. At the meeting, a week before the invasion, Mr. Bolsonaro said Brazil stood "in solidarity with Russia." On the same trip, he said Brazil would double its purchases of Russian fertilizers.

After the invasion began, Mr. Bolsonaro said Brazil would remain neutral, and made clear why. "What happens 10,000 kilometers away in Ukraine has reverberations in Brazil," he said. "We have special business with Russia."

"For us," he added, "the question of fertilizers is sacred."

Whether that fertilizer supply could get to Brazil, however, seemed questionable.

Sanctions on Russian banks quickly made it harder to carry out financial transactions, companies that help facilitate deals were halting business out of fear of repercussions and many shippers were steering clear because of high insurance premiums and safety concerns. The West also issued sanctions against the oligarchs who owned two of Russia's largest fertilizer producers.

Compounding the issue was that Belarus, Russia's closest ally and a major producer of a key fertilizer called potash, was hit with its own sanctions in February for forcing a commercial airliner to land in order to arrest a dissident.

Potash, made from potassium salt and often mined from evaporated seabeds, is crucial for growing soybeans, which Brazil produces more of than any other country. Since the start of Russia's invasion, potash prices have soared by 50 percent.

Ahead of the war, Brazilian buyers bought more Russian potash than usual, resulting in the import of 750,000 tons of fertilizer in March, much of it potash, according to government statistics. It was a record for March and a 14-percent increase from the same month last year.

However, new purchases remained difficult. So Brazil and other countries found other ways to buy from Russia.

Brazilian buyers have largely switched to using Gazprombank, a large Russian bank spared from sanctions because it handles many energy transactions for countries that have continued to buy Russian gas.

Brazilian importers have also been using Citigroup as a middleman for many transactions, in part because they believe it could help avoid any potential pitfalls with the U.S. Treasury Department, according to two bank officials close to the transactions who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the business. Larger banks like Citigroup often help facilitate such international transactions.

Once the United States made clear that Russian fertilizer was not subject to sanctions, finding shippers willing to transport the commodity also became easier.

In recent weeks, one large Russian fertilizer company sold more than 165,000 tons of potash to Brazilian buyers, with the shipments expected to arrive in June, according to an executive involved in the transactions who was not authorized to speak publicly. That was already half the Russian potash that arrived in Brazil in June 2021.

Russia has also been able to find other willing buyers for its potash in China and Southeast Asia, according to Ben Isaacson, a fertilizer analyst for Scotiabank.

“Russia is getting their potash out,” he said. “It’s not as tight of a situation as we thought.”

Last month, Mr. Bolsonaro met with the head of the World Trade Organization and asked for the agency’s help in insulating the fertilizer industry from further sanctions should the United States and other Western countries tighten their policies as the war drags on.

Still, the Brazilian government says the new flow of Russian shipments provides its farmers enough fertilizer for Brazil’s main crops over the next several months.

But concerns over accessing the Russian market have prompted a new push to make Brazil more self-sufficient. Mr. Bolsonaro and his allies have pushed to open the Amazon rainforest to mining for potassium salt to make potash. A legislative bill was put on hold only after large protests in Brazil’s capital.

For potash, “we don’t have alternatives today,” said Neri Geller, a Brazilian congressman and farmer who supported the bill. “We are dependent on Belarus and Russia. So if it didn’t come from there to here, how would we do it?”

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HEADLINE	05/08 Activists target homes of 2 Justices
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/8/activists-target-homes-justices-john-roberts-brett/
GIST	<p>The homes of two Supreme Court justices were targeted by demonstrators over the weekend as activists made good on their promise to bring the fight on Roe v. Wade to the court’s conservative majority.</p> <p>Dozens of demonstrators chanted slogans and waved signs on a rainy Saturday evening as they marched between the homes of Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh in Chevy Chase, Maryland.</p> <p>The march was organized by a neighbor, Lacie Wooten Holway, who billed it on Facebook as a “neighborhood candlelight vigil for Roe v Wade and abortion rights against our corrupt, theocratic Supreme Court.”</p> <p>“If you take away our choices, we will riot,” she told WUSA9.</p>

	<p>Pro-choice activists announced plans to protest outside the homes of the justices after Monday's leak of a Supreme Court majority draft opinion overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which established a constitutional right to abortion.</p> <p>The protest group Ruth Sent Us posted a notice for a Wednesday march on the six conservative justices' homes in Maryland and Virginia, referring to the event as "walk-by Wednesday."</p> <p>"At the homes of the six extremist justices, three in Virginia and three in Maryland. If you'd like to join or lead a peaceful protest, let us know," said the post, which included a map that was later removed by Google for violating its policies.</p> <p>Among those who had a problem with pressuring the justices at their homes was Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Georgia Republican.</p> <p>"This is illegal," Mrs. Greene tweeted. "You can't harass a judge in order to influence a decision. That's what this mob is doing."</p> <p>Nathan Brand, deputy communications director for the Republican National Committee, tweeted, "The White House refused to condemn this."</p> <p>Montgomery County police officers were on the scene to monitor the situation, but no arrests were reported.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Day 75 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/09/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-75-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy confirmed that 60 people who were sheltering in a school in Bilohorivka, near the eastern city of Luhansk, <u>were killed</u> when Russian forces bombed it this weekend. The UN has condemned the attack, with secretary general António Guterres saying he was "appalled" by it. • More than 170 civilians were successfully evacuated from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol and have arrived in Zaporizhzhia. Officials said that more than 600 people have been evacuated from the plant and from Mariupol in total. • Members of Ukraine's Azov battalion trapped inside the Azovstal steel plant meanwhile said <u>they fear they will be killed if captured by Russian forces</u>, as they pleaded with Ukrainian authorities to help arrange their extraction. Speaking to the media from inside the besieged steelworks, Lt Illya Samoilenko vowed to fight on, saying that surrender would be a "gift" to the enemy. • US president Joe Biden and other G7 leaders held a video call with Zelenskiy in a show of unity ahead of Russia's Victory Day celebrations on Monday. The G7 said it was committed to phasing out or banning Russian oil and denounced president Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. "His actions bring shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people," the group said in a statement, referring to Soviet Russia's role in defeating Nazi Germany 77 years ago. • New US visa bans on more than 2,600 Russian and Belarusian military officials include personnel believed to have operated in Bucha, the town outside Kyiv that has become synonymous with war crimes, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said. • America's top diplomat to Ukraine, Kristina Kvien, arrived with her team in Kyiv on Sunday in a step towards resuming the country's presence in the capital. The visit was timed to commemorate Victory in Europe Day. • Russian airstrikes on Sunday wounded one woman and knocked out electricity to six settlements in the Odesa region, authorities said. • Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau promised new weapons and other equipment for Ukraine after a surprise visit to the country during which he toured Irpin, a Kyiv suburb and

	<p>scene of some of the worst early attacks by Russia. He also said Canada would remove trade tariffs on all Ukrainian imports for next year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said Berlin had “made a mistake” after it banned all flags, including Ukrainian flags, as part of its decision to suppress all displays of public support for the Russian invasion on Victory Day. “Taking a Ukrainian flag away from peaceful protesters is an attack on everyone who now defends Europe and Germany from Russian aggression with this flag in hands,” he said. • The US president’s wife, Jill Biden, met with Ukraine’s first lady, Olena Zelenska, on another unannounced visit on Sunday to mark Mother’s Day, while U2’s Bono and the Edge performed in a Kyiv bomb shelter. • In an address to mark Ukraine’s 8 May remembrance and reconciliation day, Zelenskiy said his country paid homage to all those who helped defeat Adolf Hitler but accused Russia of repeating his crimes. “This year we say ‘Never again’ differently. We hear ‘Never again’ differently. It sounds painful, cruel. Without an exclamation, but with a question mark. You say: never again? Tell Ukraine about it.” • Ukraine will prevail over Russia as freedom prevailed over the Nazi dictatorship in 1945, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has said in a TV address to mark the 77th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. Scholz, whose relations with Zelenskiy have been frosty, has not yet said whether he will accept an invitation to travel to Kyiv on Monday. • The US has unveiled a new layer of sanctions on Russia, targeting services, Russia’s propaganda machine and its defence industry. They are primarily intended to close loopholes in the existing sanctions and to tighten the noose around the Russian economy by another few notches. • The UK government has expanded its sanctions against Russia to include punitive import tariffs on Russian precious metals, as well as export bans on certain UK products, to increase economic pressure on Moscow. • Putin’s regime is “mirroring” the actions of the Nazis, the UK’s defence secretary, Ben Wallace, will say on Monday as the Russian leader stages a military parade to celebrate Russia’s second world war victory, according to an advance copy of the speech. Wallace will say Putin and his inner circle should share the same fate as the Nazis, who ended up defeated and facing the Nuremberg trials for their atrocities. • Emmanuel Macron, the French president, is set to travel to Berlin for talks with Scholz on Monday and to make a major address.
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HEADLINE	05/08 US unveils new sanctions on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/08/us-unveils-new-sanctions-on-russia
GIST	<p>The US has unveiled a new layer of sanctions on Russia, targeting services, Russia’s propaganda machine and its defence industry on the eve of Vladimir Putin’s planned Victory Day parade.</p> <p>The new measures were announced as leaders from the G7 group of industrialised democracies held a virtual summit with Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy in a show of solidarity.</p> <p>They are primarily intended to close loopholes in the existing sanctions and to tighten the noose around the Russian economy by another few notches.</p> <p>The new sanctions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *A ban on sales of US services to Russia, like accountancy and management consultancy *No more US advertising or sales of broadcasting equipment to three Kremlin-controlled television stations *Technology export bans including industrial engines, bulldozers and other items that can be used by Russian defence factories *Visa restrictions on another 2,600 Russian and Belarusian individuals, including military officials, and executives from Sberbank and Gazprombank

In imposing a ban on services the US is falling into line with the UK, which made a [similar announcement last week](#). The two countries provide the overwhelming bulk of services like accountancy and management consultancy to Russian corporations.

The [Biden administration](#) sees US service providers as potential tools Russia could use to sidestep the punitive measures already imposed.

“They’ve been asked by Russian companies to help them figure out how to reformulate their business strategies in the wake of sanctions, in some cases how to get around these sanctions, or in the case of accountants how to hide some of their wealth, and we’re shutting that down,” a senior administration official said.

Like the UK, the restrictive measures [do not apply to lawyers](#), but the US official said that could change, and that Washington and London are coordinating their moves in that respect.

“We made a judgment at least for now, that if there was a desire to seek due process through a US lawyer, we would allow that to continue,” the official said. “But we’re reevaluating the breadth of these services sanctions every day, and depending on how we see behavior change over time, we can certainly broaden the sanctions.”

The new media sanctions will target three Kremlin-controlled propaganda outlets: Channel One, Russia-1 and NTV. American companies will no longer be allowed to sell equipment like video cameras or microphones to them, and US advertising on their channels will be banned. Last year, US companies bought \$300m in advertising in the Russian market.

“A lot of these advertisers have announced since the invasion that they’re going to cut their business activity with these stations, but we want to make sure that decision endures and just send a broader signal that US companies should not be in the business of funding Russian propaganda,” senior a senior administration official briefing the press ahead of the announcement.

The new technology export bans on industrial items such as heavy engines and bulldozers are intended to have an impact on Russian war efforts by hitting the supply chain for defence manufacturers. The US claims that Russia two major Russian tank plants, Uralvagonzavod Corporation and Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant, have already been forced to halt production due to a lack of foreign components.

The 2,600 new visa restrictions on individuals include military officials and Russian proxies deemed to have played a part in the invasion and there will be a new visa policy which would apply automatically to military or proxy officials involved in human rights abuses.

The targeted sanctions will also hit eight executives from Sberbank, Russian’s largest financial institution, and 27 from Gazprombank, owned by Russia’s giant gas industry. Until now Gazprombank has been left untouched because of its role in facilitating European purchases of Russian natural gas.

“This is not a full block. We’re not freezing the assets of Gazprom bank or prohibiting any transaction with Gazprombank,” the senior administration official said. “What we’re signaling is that Gazprombank is not a safe haven, so we’re sanctioning some of their top business executives, people who sit at the top of the organization, to create a chilling effect.”

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HEADLINE	05/08 Ukraine fights for besieged Mariupol
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-airstrike-kills-villagers-taking-shelter-at-school-ukraine-says-11651999227?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in strikes and counteroffensives over the weekend ahead of Moscow’s Monday commemoration of World War II , with Kyiv bracing for possible heavy attacks or a stepped-up mobilization effort by President Vladimir Putin .

In Ukraine's east, authorities said Sunday that a Russian airstrike in the Luhansk region was believed to have [killed some 60 villagers who had taken refuge in a school](#). In the besieged southeastern city of Mariupol, Ukrainian forces vowed to fight until the end as they pleaded for government help. Ukrainian troops, meanwhile, pushed north and northeast of Kharkiv after ousting Russian forces from key towns in its vicinity.

The U.S. also [announced new sanctions](#) targeting Russian state-controlled media and banking executives, a ban on Americans providing accounting and management-consulting services and new export controls targeting the country's industrial sector.

Western officials and analysts expect Mr. Putin to use the World War II commemorations to address [the war in Ukraine](#), possibly declaring victory or, in what some see as a more likely scenario, pledging to carry on the fight.

Mr. Putin might also call for a mass mobilization of Russia's army and its citizens, some Western and Ukrainian defense and intelligence officials have speculated.

The Kremlin has brushed off such talk as unfounded rumors.

Ukrainian officials have warned that Moscow may be planning a particularly heavy series of strikes on Monday, coinciding with [the World War II commemoration](#). Some regions, such as Odessa, have announced a curfew from Sunday evening to Monday morning.

In Mariupol, Azov Regiment leaders said thousands of civilians have perished after weeks of heavy Russian bombardment. Ukrainian troops, meanwhile, [remain holed up inside the Azovstal steel plant](#), where evacuation efforts successfully rescued women, children and elderly people in recent days.

"We can't just leave, we can only be evacuated," said Lt. Ilia Samoilenko of Ukraine's Azov Regiment in an online news conference from Azovstal. "We are basically dead men. Most of us know this."

Azov deputy commander Capt. Svyatoslav Palamar said more than 25,000 civilians have been killed in the Russian onslaught, which has lasted for well over two months.

He acknowledged that hundreds of civilians who were sheltering in the Soviet-era network of bunkers under the Azovstal steel plant have been evacuated, but said others might remain.

"Not a single international organization nor representative of politicians or governments has been here to help," Capt. Palamar said.

A spokesman for Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky declined to comment, saying it was a question for the military to address. Mr. Zelensky has previously called on Russia to release or exchange those remaining at Azovstal.

"If they kill people who can be exchanged as prisoners of war or just released as civilians or be helped as wounded or injured, civilian and military alike, if they destroy them, I don't think we can have any diplomatic talks with them after that," he said Friday.

The Azov regiment and 100 marines are the only Ukrainians still fighting in Mariupol. They have killed more than 2,500 Russian troops and wounded many more, and destroyed 60 tanks, Lt. Samoilenko said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Ukraine rebuilding as fast Russia destroys
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/08/ukraine-rebuilds-destroyed-cities/

BUCHA, Ukraine — The mere sight of a child here — wearing sunglasses, pulling a scooter, bugging his mother to buy him candy — was enough to impress Petro Trotsenko, a stall owner at a market in Bucha that reopened this past week.

Just over a month ago, the market lay bare, looted of all its wares, cut up by shrapnel. The nearby glass factory where Trotsenko, 74, worked in his younger years was being used as a torture chamber by Russian soldiers occupying this suburb of Kyiv. The bodies of 22 people from his neighborhood, [summarily executed](#) over the course of March, [lay where they had fallen in the streets](#). Nearly every yard was filled with rubble, burned-out vehicles and makeshift graves. Nearly every family with children had fled.

Trotsenko and his wife, who hid for weeks in their basement, burned wood from the fence that surrounded their house to boil rainwater. That's how they cooked the gruel that kept them alive.

But in about the same amount of time as the Russians occupied Bucha, the city has remade itself. The market is open, and Trotsenko has restocked. Huge divots in roads where the shells fell have been paved over. The suburban train to Kyiv is running again. Water and electricity have been largely restored. Families are returning.

President Volodymyr Zelensky says it will cost Ukraine at least \$600 billion to rebuild what has been destroyed in Bucha and across the country during the Russian invasion. But local officials and regular citizens are not waiting for some new Marshall Plan. They are cleaning up and rebuilding their cities, even as the question of when the war will end remains unanswerable.

The rebuilding effort is imbued with a sense of optimism that Ukraine will outlast Russia's assault. Volunteers are mostly carrying it out, allowing government funds to remain focused on the war.

In places where scars are still fresh, such as Bucha, or still being inflicted, like Kharkiv and other cities in eastern Ukraine, the driving force behind rebuilding is Ukrainians' determination to prove to Russia — and to themselves — that Ukraine is anything but defeated.

In Kharkiv, Stas Bocharnikov, a manager at a distribution company, felt so restless to get back to normal that he could only bear one week in a bomb shelter at the beginning of the war. Since then, he has spent nearly every day wrangling volunteers to clear the debris from strike sites — work that allows for more-specialized crews to get on with the task of either demolishing or rebuilding damaged structures.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-most-populous city, is just 25 miles from the Russian border. For more than 70 days it has been battered by artillery and air bombardment, and most buildings in the city have at least lost their windows to blast. But Bocharnikov now has enough volunteers that he fills buses with them, dispatching them every day to different parts of the city.

Once Bocharnikov gets the word from the local emergency services unit that an area has been cleared of cluster munitions, the teams get to work, sometimes with the booms of artillery in the background.

The risk is worth it for one simple reason, he said: "I don't want to live in crap."

At a damaged culinary school on a recent day, the volunteers ranged from women in their 60s to a 12-year-old boy. They tossed scattered bricks into waste piles but carefully saved cookbooks and utensils that had somehow survived the explosion.

People aren't paid, Bocharnikov said; the most he's ever given them was some cigarettes or a free meal prepared by other volunteers in the city.

"When people will one day talk about how we rebuilt Kharkiv, I want to tell my kids or grandkids that I helped," said 19-year-old Darina Potapenko.

The next day, the same group of volunteers worked in a different part of town — a residential area where a flurry of mortars had crashed through front doors and ceilings. With orange gloves on, Marina Smelianskaia, 53, a former lab worker, dug her shovel into a pile of rubble to clear it from the building's front stoop.

On the bus ride to the neighborhood, Smelianskaia was demoralized by how many buildings were still damaged in the area — and how she was barely making a dent when Russian rockets were wrecking homes anew every evening. She kept shoveling.

“People worked here about two weeks ago — they already cleaned this area — and it was hit again,” she said. “Now we’re cleaning it again. So this feeling of accomplishment isn’t there yet for me.”

Continued shelling in Kharkiv has done little to deter the volunteers. Tulips have been planted throughout downtown, and city workers were cutting the grass in hard-hit neighborhoods.

In front of the city's destroyed regional administration building, Valentina Orlova, 73, hurriedly planted yellow pansies early this past week. It was around noon, and the work needed to be done by 2 p.m.

“That’s when the shelling usually starts, so we need to finish quickly to get home,” she said.

If an ongoing Ukrainian counteroffensive succeeds in Kharkiv, fighting may let up in coming weeks, giving the volunteers more time to rebuild in more meaningful ways. If that happens, the efforts made by residents of Kyiv's suburbs, including Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel — all of which were extensively demolished — may serve as a template.

In Irpin, a suburb that was formerly home to about 60,000 people, municipal workers have worked on half-pay to repair dozens of water and sewage pumps.

“We worked day and night without a day off,” said Artur Zahodirenko, the director of Irpin's municipal water service, which relied on equipment supplied by aid agencies.

About 16,000 people have returned to Irpin in recent days, said the mayor, Oleksandr Markushin. If the progress in restoring services continues apace, he said, he'll formally invite all residents back on May 15.

This past week, a bank reopened, as did numerous kindergartens. The completely destroyed road bridge between Irpin and Kyiv, infamous as a place where many were killed by snipers while trying to flee during the occupation, is now passable by car.

The renewal has coincided with the arrival of spring in northern Ukraine, and Kyiv's suburbs are covered in a blanket of dandelions and fresh grass. Brightly colored laundry sways in the gentle, warm breeze. Two boys carrying skateboards crossed paths with a female friend, her hair newly dyed pink, in one of Irpin's many parks.

Markushin, who never left Irpin during the occupation, recently put out an open call for architects, designers and engineers willing to lend their services for free to help rebuild the city. He expected about a dozen responses, but instead was overwhelmed.

“We thought only a few people will come, but 121 specialists came today. Just imagine! 121! We were shocked,” he said. “Today we toured several locations and in a few weeks they will provide their first plans.”

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HEADLINE	05/08 Strong winds fuel New Mexico wildfire
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/08/new-mexico-wildfires-wind/

LAS VEGAS, N.M. — Strong winds continued into the day Sunday, helping spread the second-largest wildfire on record in New Mexico farther into small farming communities in the state's mountain valleys, as crews expect many more days of severe conditions.

The Calf Canyon Fire kept moving south and east on Sunday and is expected to push that direction overnight as winds stay strong all night. It has also spread north, establishing on the far side of a highway that firefighters had hoped to use as a containment line.

Although no deaths have been reported, the fire has destroyed at least 276 structures and led to the evacuation of nearly 13,000 residences.

Here in a town of more than 13,000 people about 120 miles northeast of Albuquerque, residents banded together in the face of uncertainty.

At a former middle school now serving as a shelter, Janna Lopez dished out plates of pasta, brisket and pulled pork on Saturday evening.

Lopez, who was evacuated from her home in Las Vegas about a week ago and is now staying with her cousin, has been coming to the shelter to serve other evacuees every day. It was a sense of helplessness that moved her to do something for people whose lives had been upended by the fires.

"I was crying at home saying, 'What can I do?' " Lopez said. "And that's when it evolved — we can cook."

So she and her family made a full New Mexican meal of pozole, enchiladas and red chile to take to one of the evacuation shelters. She then joined the not-for-profit World Central Kitchen's efforts to provide food.

She still remembers the trees burning as she packed up papers and grabbed photos of her 8-year-old daughter off the walls in the two hours she had to gather her belongings.

"Just a lot of worry here — when can we go home, *can* we go home?" Lopez said.

Winds were so strong that they swung treetops and street signs, while dusting the city with bits of white and black ash. The air was filled with the smell of burning wood, the sky covered with gray haze.

By nightfall, orange flames outlined steep slopes, and pillars of light formed where trees were torched.

"The high winds have been the biggest factor against us," Michael Montoya, a Las Vegas city council member, told The Washington Post on Saturday. "There's no end in sight."

Todd Abel, operations section chief with the Southwest Area Incident Management Team, said Sunday morning that aerial crews were working to contain the fire. But the strength of the winds had grounded many plans and aircraft, according to U.S. Forest Service officials.

Winds of 30 to 40 mph, with gusts up to 60 mph, were "incredible" and "precedent setting," Abel said, adding that they are expected to continue through Monday.

The fire, now more than a month old, has already burned 176,273 acres and is 43 percent contained, said Mike De Fries, information officer with the Southwest Coordination Center, an interagency group that organizes wildfire response. In late April, it merged with the Hermit's Peak Fire to the east, a prescribed burn that fire crews lost control of amid strong winds. The cause of the Calf Canyon Fire is under investigation.

A crew of 1,685 personnel and a large aircraft fleet — including four water scoopers and 12 helicopters — are working feverishly to combat the fierce blaze, which has a perimeter stretching roughly 300 miles.

“Right now, we are in this multiday wind event and we have our resources deployed to take on fire in areas where it’s being most aggressive at pushing on the actual perimeter of the fire or threatening communities,” De Fries told The Post on Sunday.

“The fire definitely is pushing to grow, and we’re just trying to protect the communities and limit the growth,” he added.

The winds have pushed the fire toward rural communities north of Las Vegas, De Fries said, with more evacuation alerts issued there Sunday afternoon. Las Vegas, the most densely populated area in the fire’s vicinity, has seen some evacuation orders lifted as containment efforts have reduced the threats to that city.

But with high winds creating erratic fire behavior expected to last several days, many people who have been out of their homes for weeks may be asked to continue to do so for days.

The strong winds overlapping with dry air, low humidity and above-average temperatures created what the National Weather Service described as “dangerous conditions” on Sunday. Authorities had warned these tinderbox conditions could lead to rapid wildfire spread and new fire starts throughout the day Sunday and in the following days.

On Sunday, Dave Bales, incident commander with the Southwest Area Incident Management Team, described the weather Sunday as “unheard of in this part of the world,” with winds expected to blow well into this week without interruption.

“With 50-mile-per-hour-plus winds, this fire is moving rapidly,” Bales said Sunday night. “It’s coming and it’s coming fast.”

Most of the evacuation and emergency operations were being coordinated from Las Vegas. As many as 3,000 more homes in the Las Vegas area could be told to evacuate. Officials have already emptied a psychiatric hospital, the jail and the United World College boarding school in the town.

Evacuation alerts began Sunday in a third county, Taos, on the northwest edge of the fire. Fire officials are stressing that for people who have remained in evacuation areas, it is time to leave before smoke or fire makes that impossible.

On Saturday evening, San Miguel County Sheriff Chris Lopez warned residents to evacuate “before it’s too late” and urged people to brace for the worst given the expected dangerous conditions.

“It’s hard to predict exactly what’s going to happen, but it ain’t good,” Lopez said.

Located in the higher terrain east of Santa Fe in Mora and San Miguel counties, in the northern New Mexico, the Calf Canyon Fire is among six large blazes burning in New Mexico.

The fires have burned more than 270,000 acres so far this year, and the fire season is just entering its peak period. Sunday also saw the residents of Los Alamos alerted about possible evacuations early this week, as the Cerro Pelado Fire to the west of Santa Fe picked up in the high winds.

“We can’t put it more plainly than this — if you are in a mandatory evacuation area, you need to GO NOW,” Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) tweeted Saturday night. “Tonight we will enter an exceptionally dangerous period of extreme fire weather. As severe winds pick up, conditions may worsen and air support may be limited.”

On Sunday night, she tweeted that several communities in Mora County were under an emergency evacuation order.

HEADLINE	05/06 WA ever-evolving refugee population
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/equity/2022/05/beyond-afghans-and-ukrainians-who-are-wa-refugees
GIST	<p>Turmoil over the past year uprooted the lives of thousands of people from Afghanistan and Ukraine. Some are landing in Washington, joining a diverse population of people who call the state home for now.</p> <p>Washington opened its doors to those displaced after conflict erupted in Kabul last August and made the commitment once again to Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion, which began in late February.</p> <p>The Evergreen State may seem like an odd destination for arrivals: nestled in the northwest corner of the United States, far from historic immigration entry points in New York and San Francisco. Yet Washington ranked among the top states for initial resettlement of refugees in fiscal year 2019, alongside Texas, California and New York. (Refugee arrivals and admissions caps are tallied in fiscal years.) The new arrivals are only the latest additions in Washington, which has seen refugee resettlement evolve as people from across the world, including Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia, arrived in recent years.</p> <p>Ukraine and Afghanistan were the top countries of origin for refugees who arrived in Washington from 2016 to 2020 (numbers may vary, depending on how an agency defines "refugee").</p> <p>Yet displaced people have set down roots and built communities across Washington for years — “even when other states tried to turn them away,” Gov. Jay Inslee's office wrote in a statement published in Medium in late April.</p> <p>A history of refugees</p> <p>Many look to the Vietnam War as a defining moment for resettlement in Washington, when then-Gov. Dan Evans opened the state's doors to 500 Vietnamese refugees in 1975. Thousands of others affected by the war eventually made their way to Washington, which continues to receive displaced people from around the world today.</p> <p>In 2010, for example, more than 800 refugees from Myanmar and nearly 600 from Iraq arrived in Washington, according to data from the federal Refugee Processing Center. The state also saw an influx of more than 500 refugees from Bhutan, over 200 from Somalia and more than 150 from Eritrea in that window of time.</p> <p>Since then, the arrival of different refugee communities in Washington has fluctuated. The number of people from Iraq, for example, dipped and spiked over the years, including a low of four in 2018 and a peak of 712 in 2014. By the end of 2021, nearly 4,000 refugees from the country, as well as thousands more from Myanmar and Somalia, arrived in the state.</p> <p>Other refugee communities have come to Washington in the past few years, including those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Syria, Moldova, Ethiopia and Russia.</p> <p>Part of the reason people land in Washington may boil down to the number of resettlement agencies represented in Washington state, said Liz Nelson, the outreach manager of World Relief. Nelson, whose organization helps resettle refugees coming into the state, also noted refugees are unlikely to have a say in where they land, unless they have a local tie.</p> <p>The strength of Washington's economy may also make it well-suited to welcome refugees, said Cordelia Revells of Jewish Family Service.</p> <p>“Very soon after arrival, refugees need to be financially self-sufficient,” said Revells, director of refugee and immigrant services at the agency. “So obviously having access to jobs is key to that.”</p> <p>Washington's shifting numbers</p> <p>Washington's history of accepting refugees conflicted with the U.S. government's approach in recent years.</p>

“Resettlement agencies see shifts in the communities we’re receiving based on what is happening overseas,” Revells said. “But it also can depend on the administration at the time. So, for instance, under [former President Donald Trump’s] administration, we were not seeing many refugees coming from Muslim-majority countries.”

At the beginning of 2017, Trump issued an executive order that put a [90-day ban](#) on anyone coming in from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria or Yemen. The order drew swift criticism, including in Washington state, which was the first to [file a lawsuit](#) against the order. The travel decree went through different iterations, including one in March 2017, when Iraq was [removed from the list](#).

“My message to President Trump is — not so fast,” Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson said [in a statement](#) at the time. “After spending more than a month to fix a broken order that he rushed out the door, the President’s new order reinstates several of the same provisions and has the same illegal motivations as the original.”

Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign partly rode on the promise to restrict immigration. He followed through early in his term when he [slashed the cap on refugee admissions](#) to 45,000 in 2018, a considerably low ceiling and dramatic reversal from former President Barack Obama’s [110,000 cap](#) in 2017.

Trump continued to drop the refugee ceiling in the following years, setting a historic low when he [limited admissions](#) to 15,000 people for 2021.

Federal immigration policies combined with the COVID-19 pandemic changed the dynamic of arrivals, according to Nelson of World Relief.

“That meant that a lot of countries where we would normally be seeing people arriving through the refugee resettlement program, they just weren’t eligible to come to the United States under any program or visa,” she said.

The federal government’s approach to refugees shifted after the 2020 election, which ushered in a new administration under President Joe Biden, who [more than quadrupled the admissions cap](#) to allow 62,500 arrivals for 2021.

Biden [increased the cap](#) again for the 2022, doubling it to 125,000.

Where refugees are today

A large number of refugees are concentrated in the most populous part of the state.

[About half of Washington’s refugees resettled in King County](#), according to a 2021 report from the state Department of Social and Health Services. Refugees also tended to land in Clark (11%), Pierce (10%), Snohomish (9%), Spokane (7%) and Benton-Franklin (3%) counties.

Nelson’s branch of World Relief focuses on Western Washington, with offices in King and Whatcom counties. When it comes to picking a place to resettle people, the organization seeks out one feature in particular: the availability of affordable housing. As a result, these individuals tend to be placed in cities like Federal Way, Des Moines, Everett and Lynnwood.

Refugees can also benefit in environments where their neighbor’s backgrounds mirror their own.

“There’s obviously numerous advantages for a new family coming in to be placed in a neighborhood and a community where they will find other families who speak that same language,” said Revells of Jewish Family Service. “Who understand their traditions. Who can help them with the process in addition to what the resettlement agency can do.”

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/fighting-fire-with-fire-after-18-years-wa-restarts-prescribed-burns-on-public-lands/
GIST	<p>SPRINGDALE, Stevens County — One by one, the firefighters pour the diesel-gasoline mix out of their big red drip torches and set the forest aflame.</p> <p>They start a tidy line of small fires first, then fan out, lighting up slash piles and dead brush here and there. The woods get warm. Sap crackles and pops. Within minutes the bright green hillside is covered in wind-blown waves of light gray smoke.</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Natural Resources burned 108 acres Tuesday between Springdale and Loon Lake in Stevens County. It's just the second time the department has done a prescribed burn since 2004, and it marks the beginning of a dramatic shift in how the state manages public lands.</p> <p>Eastern Washington is going to see more prescribed burns in the coming years.</p> <p>"We'd like to see a lot more — hundreds of thousands of acres," said Kate Williams, the Department of Natural Resources' acting prescribed fire program manager.</p> <p>For 18 years, Washington hasn't burned state lands on purpose. New smoke policies aimed at protecting air quality were part of the reason for the prescribed fire shutdown, Williams said. An uptick in wildfires was a big factor, too.</p> <p>But in the last few years, as catastrophic megafires have become commonplace throughout the West, state and federal agencies have pushed hard to bring prescribed fires back. Many argue they're essential to fight wildfires and restore healthy forests.</p> <p>Not all fire is bad, they stress.</p> <p>"By putting some good fire on the landscape now, we really reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire later in the season or years to come," Williams said.</p> <p>Wildfires have gotten worse for a few key reasons.</p> <p>Climate change has made the planet warmer, leading to hotter, drier and longer fire seasons. Invasive species such as cheatgrass are a big part of the problem on the sagebrush steppe. A century of fire suppression has allowed fuels to build up in forests, paving the way for bigger and hotter burns that can have devastating environmental consequences.</p> <p>Prescribed burns are a way of undoing the ecological damage caused by long-term fire suppression. They mimic the beneficial, natural fires that would have swept across the landscape periodically if Americans hadn't been consistently putting them out.</p> <p>"This is an awesome tool that we've lost for a long time," said Shawn Soliday, a land manager and incident commander with the Department of Natural Resources who has fought wildfires for 41 seasons. "It's the right tool."</p> <p>Prescribed fires have a host of benefits.</p> <p>Many Western ecosystems, including ponderosa pine forests, evolved with fire and need it to remain healthy. Prescribed burns help restore the natural ecological functions of many environments.</p> <p>By removing fuels, a prescribed fire can stop or slow big wildfires. The burn area can act as a buffer between an inferno and a town.</p> <p>Andrew Stenbeck, a regional manager with the Department of Natural Resources, said the 108-acre Stevens County burn will help the forest in a few specific ways.</p>

Most importantly, he said, it's returning fire to ponderosa pine stands that evolved with it and need it.

"Typically a fire would have burned through there, low intensity, every 10 to 15 years," he said. "We've probably missed 10 [fires] in the history of this stand."

Without fire, the forest has become more Douglas fir heavy, to the detriment of the ponderosas and the natural ecology of the area.

Before the 40 or so Department of Natural Resources firefighters began the Stevens County burn Tuesday morning, the area looked vibrant.

The ponderosas were few and far between, because of a recent timber harvest, but purple and yellow wildflowers grew out of the ground everywhere. Turkeys could be heard gobbling on the property.

Now, much of the ground is charred. But the bleak appearance is deceptive, Stenbeck said.

The burn will release nutrients, in turn allowing for an explosion of growth. A new, healthier forest will rise from the ashes.

The same will happen on thousands of acres of Eastern Washington forests as the state's prescribed fire program grows and fire returns to the ecosystems that need it.

"It's good to see," Stenbeck said as he watched the fire burn. "We're going to be creating some better landscapes."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Workers new stresses: return to office
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/workers-grapple-with-new-stresses-as-they-return-to-office/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Last summer, Julio Carmona started the process of weaning himself off a fully remote work schedule by showing up to the office once a week.</p> <p>The new hybrid schedule at his job at a state agency in Stratford, Connecticut, still enabled him to spend time cooking dinner for his family and taking his teenage daughter to basketball.</p> <p>But in the next few months, he's facing the likelihood of more mandatory days in the office. And that's creating stress for the father of three.</p> <p>Carmona, 37, whose father died from COVID-19 last year, worries about contracting the virus but he also ticks off a list of other anxieties: increased costs for lunch and gas, day care costs for his newborn baby, and his struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance.</p> <p>"Working from home has been a lot less stressful when it comes to work-life balance," said Carmona, who works in finance at Connecticut's Department of Children and Families. "You are more productive because there are a lot less distractions."</p> <p>As more companies mandate a return to the office, workers must readjust to pre-pandemic rituals like long commutes, juggling child care and physically interacting with colleagues. But such routines have become more difficult two years later. Spending more time with your colleagues could increase exposure to the coronavirus, for example, while inflation has increased costs for lunch and commuting.</p> <p>Among workers who were remote and have gone back at least one day a week in-person, more say things in general have gotten better than worse and that they've been more productive rather than less, an April poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows. But the level of stress for these workers is elevated.</p>

Overall, among employed adults, the April AP-NORC poll shows 16% say they work remotely, 13% work both remotely and in-person and 72% say they work only in-person.

Thirty-nine percent of employees who had worked at home but have returned to the office say the way things are going generally has gotten better since returning in-person at the workplace, while 23% say things have gotten worse; 38% say things have stayed the same. Forty-five percent say the amount of work getting done has improved, while 18% say it's worsened.

But 41% of returned workers say the amount of stress they experience has worsened; 22% say it's gotten better and 37% say it hasn't changed.

Even workers who have been in person throughout the pandemic are more negative than positive about the way the pandemic has impacted their work lives. Thirty-five percent say the way things are going in general has gotten worse, while 20% say it's gotten better. Fifty percent say their stress has worsened, while just 11% say it's gotten better; 39% say there's no difference.

At least half of in-person workers say balancing responsibilities, potential COVID exposure at work, their commute and social interaction are sources of stress. But fewer than a third call these "major" sources of stress.

People with children were more likely to report their return was having an adverse effect, some of it stemming from concerns about keeping their families safe from COVID and maintaining a better work-life balance. Most said it could help alleviate stress if their employer provided more flexible work options and workplace safety precautions from the virus. But for some workers, a physical return — in any form — will be hard to navigate.

"A lot of people have gotten accustomed to working from home. It's been two years," said Jessica Edwards, national director of strategic alliances and development at the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a U.S.-based advocacy group. "For companies, it's all about prioritizing mental health and being communicative about it. They should not be afraid of asking their employees how are they really doing."

Companies like Vanguard are now expanding virtual wellness workshops that started in the early days of the pandemic or before. They're also expanding benefits to include meditation apps and virtual therapy. Meanwhile, Target, which hasn't set a mandatory return, is giving teams the flexibility of adjusting meeting times to earlier or later in the day to accommodate employees' schedules.

A lot is at stake. Estimates show that untreated mental illness may cost companies up to \$300 billion annually, largely due to impacts on productivity, absenteeism, and increases in medical and disability expenses, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Russ Glass, CEO of online mental health and wellbeing platform Headspace Health, said he has seen a fourfold spike in the use of behavioral health coaching and a fivefold spike in clinical services like therapy and psychiatric help during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic days. With apps like Ginger and Headspace, the company serves more than 100 million people and 3,500 companies. Among the top worries: anxiety over contracting COVID-19, and struggles with work-life balance.

We haven't seen it abate. That level of care has just stayed high," Glass said.

The constant wave of new virus surges hasn't helped.

Francine Yoon, a 24-year-old food scientist at Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition North America, in Itasca, Illinois, has been working mostly in person since the pandemic, including at her current job that she started last fall. Yoon said her company has helped to ease anxiety by doing things like creating huddle rooms and empty offices to create more distance for those experiencing any form of anxiety about being in close proximity to colleagues.

	<p>But moving in last year with her older parents, both in their early 60s, has led to some heightened level of anxiety because she's worried about passing on the virus to them. She said every surge of new cases creates some anxiety.</p> <p>"When cases are low, I feel comfortable and confident that I am OK and that I will be OK," she said. "When surges occur, I can't help but become cautious."</p> <p>As for Carmona, he's trying to lower his stress and is considering participating in his office's online meditation sessions. He's also thinking of carpooling to reduce gas costs.</p> <p>"I am one of those people that take it day by day," he said. "You have to try to keep your stress level balanced because you will run your brain into the ground thinking about things that could go haywire."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Covid pills; experts fear repeat AIDS crisis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/us/politics/covid-pills-global-aids-hiv.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A devastating virus was laying waste to nations that lacked medicines available to Americans. The pills were patented and pricey. Poor countries lacked refrigeration to store them, the thinking went, and patients would not be able to follow the complex dosing regimen.</p> <p>The year was 2002, the virus was H.I.V., and the president, George W. Bush, secretly sent his top health advisers to Africa to investigate what activists were calling "medical apartheid." In the 20 years since, the United States has led the way in building a global infrastructure for H.I.V. testing and treatment, saving an estimated 21 million lives.</p> <p>Now, with that history in mind, global health agencies and the Biden administration are working to bring coronavirus tests and expensive antiviral pills to low- and middle-income nations. This week, President Biden will emphasize "global test to treat" at his second international Covid-19 summit, a virtual gathering of world leaders aimed at injecting new energy into the international pandemic response.</p> <p>Until now, the response has been focused largely on vaccinations, which remain a high priority. But Mr. Biden will also use the summit to call on wealthy nations to donate \$2 billion to purchase Covid treatments and \$1 billion to purchase oxygen supplies for low- and middle-income countries, according to a senior administration official involved with the planning.</p> <p>In the United States, where antiviral pills to combat Covid are widely available, Mr. Biden's "test to treat" initiative lets many patients go to pharmacies, get tested for Covid and receive a free prescription on the spot if they test positive. In low- and middle-income nations, such efforts will most likely be much more limited until generic pills arrive, probably in 2023.</p> <p>But the global effort faces some of the same obstacles and inequities that existed two decades ago.</p> <p>Rich nations, including the United States, have gobbled up much of the supply. Global health agencies do not have the money to buy the antivirals or tests, which are crucial because the medication needs to be started early in the course of infection. Drug companies, trying to protect their patents, are limiting the supply of generic alternatives in many middle-income countries, including an entire swath of Latin America.</p> <p>All of this is playing out against the infectious disease equivalent of a ticking time bomb.</p> <p>"We all expect a major new surge from Omicron or a new variant in the global south from June to September, and if that happens, we are not going to be ready with test and treat," said Dr. Bill Rodriguez, who runs the testing arm of the ACT Accelerator, the Geneva-based consortium coordinating the global response. "It feels extremely similar — painfully, ironically, tragically similar — to what happened with H.I.V."</p>

On Monday, ahead of the summit, the consortium, which is backed by the World Health Organization, is set to convene a discussion of global health experts and declare access to testing and treatment an “equity issue,” officials said.

Mr. Biden may well show up at his own summit empty-handed. The White House has asked Congress for an additional \$22.5 billion in emergency coronavirus aid, including \$5 billion for the global response, but Senate Republicans are refusing to authorize any funding unless it is offset by cuts to other programs. A \$10 billion compromise proposal includes no money for the global response, and it is unclear when or whether that plan will come up for a vote.

“Here we are with another virus that’s creating havoc all over the world,” said Gayle Smith, who ran the State Department’s global Covid response under Mr. Biden and is now chief executive of the One Campaign, an advocacy organization. “Maybe it’s not as lethal as H.I.V., but it’s still pretty bad. And we’ve got therapeutics. How are we going to think about this? Are we going to take the lessons learned and have a plan?”

One of the biggest hurdles is the rapid decline of Covid testing around the world. The W.H.O.-backed consortium recently reported that just 20 percent of the 5.7 billion tests conducted globally have been in low- and middle-income nations. Low-income countries accounted for less than 1 percent of the testing. The reasons are twofold: Countries lack money to buy the tests, and demand has dropped in regions where Covid rates are now low.

“What really worries me is the testing part of this,” said Dr. Bruce Aylward, a top W.H.O. official and the consortium’s coordinator. “If you’re not testing, you can’t sequence, you can’t isolate, you can’t treat. Everything else unravels.”

Paxlovid, the more powerful of the two Covid antiviral pills approved by the Food and Drug Administration, is so plentiful in the United States that pharmacies are struggling to use up their supplies. The Biden administration has committed to purchasing 20 million treatment courses for Americans.

The W.H.O. recently issued a “strong recommendation” that Paxlovid, which is made by Pfizer, be given to patients at high risk of hospitalization and called for its “wide geographic distribution.” The W.H.O. has given a far weaker “conditional recommendation” to the other drug, molnupiravir, which is made by Merck and is not nearly as in demand.

Global health experts say both companies have absorbed the lessons of AIDS — but only to a point.

They have each agreed to allocate several million courses of treatment — a total of seven million courses in all — to UNICEF for distribution in most low- and middle-income countries, which account for more than half the world’s population. But UNICEF will not be able to buy the drugs unless it can raise the money to do so or countries supply the funds. And seven million courses is hardly enough to address the need, experts say.

The cost to UNICEF of Paxlovid — including Pfizer’s insistence that UNICEF keep how much it pays confidential — remains a sticking point, said Dr. Philippe Duneton, who runs the therapeutics arm of the W.H.O. consortium. In announcing its “strong recommendation” for Paxlovid, the W.H.O. took the highly unusual step of publicly scolding Pfizer for a “lack of transparency,” which makes it difficult to know which countries have the drug and what they are paying.

“We need to have better visibility in terms of price,” Dr. Duneton said.

Manufacturers often prefer that the details of their sales agreements be secret so as not to weaken their hand with other potential buyers. Pfizer’s chief executive, Albert Bourla, reported last week that Paxlovid had been a “key growth driver” for the company, which is using a “tiered pricing approach” in which low- and lower-middle-income countries will get Paxlovid at a not-for-profit price.

In response to an inquiry from The New York Times, Pfizer issued a statement saying that it was “deeply disappointed by the sentiment expressed by our partners,” adding, “We have in good faith heard and responded to many of their concerns.”

Both Pfizer and Merck have also taken steps to make inexpensive generic versions of their pills available, signing licensing agreements with the Medicines Patent Pool, which was created during the global AIDS crisis to bring drugs to low- and middle-income nations at low cost. It took years, and bitter fights between activists and companies, to reach such agreements for H.I.V. drugs.

But the agreements for Covid antivirals do not apply to many middle-income nations, including much of Latin America and parts of northern Africa and Asia. The result, experts say, is that both poor and rich nations will have access, but countries in the middle will have to negotiate with the companies — or force the drugmakers to turn over their intellectual property.

So far, 36 companies from 12 countries have signed up to make generic Paxlovid. Companies in India are already making generic versions of both Paxlovid and molnupiravir. The expectation is that both drugs will ultimately be available in about 100 low- and middle-income countries, covering about half the world’s population. The companies will not receive royalties from the sales while the W.H.O.’s declaration of the pandemic as a global health emergency remains in effect.

“Given the severity of the pandemic and given the fact that vaccines had a very uneven penetration rate, we felt that this was a very important contribution the company could make,” said Paul Schaper, executive director for global public policy at Merck.

But those generics will not be available until next year. In the meantime, doctors and activists around the world say vulnerable patients are dying as antiviral pills, monoclonal antibodies and even oxygen remain out of reach. In countries with low vaccination rates, the need is especially urgent.

In Uganda, Dr. Sabrina Kitaka, a pediatrician who also advises the government on Covid-19 vaccination, said many children with underlying conditions — sickle cell disease, diabetes, advanced H.I.V. disease — have had complications from Covid-19. She has lost young patients who would have been eligible for Paxlovid, which is approved in the United States for children 12 and older who weigh at least 40 kilograms, or about 88 pounds.

“Paxlovid will be the game changer,” Dr. Kitaka said. That is especially true “for patients who become critically ill and end up in the I.C.U.,” she added.

In the Dominican Republic, Pfizer is fighting a petition for the government to compel the company to share its patents for Paxlovid with generic makers. Similar petitions have been filed in Colombia, Chile and Peru.

“Both Merck and Pfizer have reserved for themselves all the high-income countries and virtually all of the upper-middle-income countries and even some lower-middle-income countries,” said Brook Baker, a law professor at Northeastern University who has submitted a legal brief in support of the Dominican Republic petition.

In Brazil, regulators have authorized both Paxlovid and molnupiravir. The country and Pfizer are negotiating a purchase agreement so Paxlovid can be offered for free through Brazil’s public health system.

But a quarter of Brazilians have private insurance and may already have access to the drug, said Felipe Carvalho, coordinator of the Doctors Without Borders Access Campaign in Latin America.

“We have a world divided between treatment for the rich and treatment for the poor, still today,” Mr. Carvalho said, adding, “We are still struggling 20 years, 30 years after the H.I.V.-AIDS crisis to convince companies to do the right thing.”

In 2003, after he sent top government health experts, including Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, to Africa, Mr. Bush created PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which supports clinics, medical personnel and community health workers.

Dr. Deborah L. Birx, who ran PEPFAR for seven years and also served as President Donald J. Trump’s coronavirus response coordinator, said that Covid vaccination campaigns relied on the program’s infrastructure and networks and that a “test to treat” effort could too. Delivering drugs in Africa can be easier than in the rural United States, she said.

“Unlike the United States,” Dr. Birx said, “we have shown that we can deliver drugs to the far end of the road, no matter where people live.”

Leaders of the ACT Accelerator consortium are eager to get started. They have plans to expand rapid testing in 20 “priority countries,” mostly in Africa, and to run pilot “test to treat” programs in 10 nations. But both initiatives are in limbo because of a lack of money and a separate reason that officials find even more troubling: a sense of pandemic fatigue in nations whose leaders have other pressing priorities.

“We have never been more ready to roll out global testing and treatment for any disease than we are for Covid right now,” said Dr. Rodriguez, who runs the consortium’s testing arm. But the halting pace saddens him: “It’s painful. It’s really painful.”

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HEADLINE	05/07 Tunisia democratic experiment unravels
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/07/world/middleeast/tunisia-democracy-economy.html
GIST	<p>TUNIS — The last time Tunisia plunged into political crisis — its infant democracy unraveling amid political deadlock, assassinations and mass unrest — it fell to the country’s traditional guardians to find a way forward.</p> <p>A heavyweight coalition of unions, lawyers and rights activists stepped in to preserve the constitutional system, earning them the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel committee credited the National Dialogue Quartet, as the groups were known, with protecting the gains of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which felled the country’s longtime dictator and kindled the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East.</p> <p>For a decade, Tunisia was the success story that much of the rest of the world wanted. While other Arab revolts withered in civil wars, coups or crackdowns, democracy in Tunisia — a wedge of 12 million people that juts toward Italy from North Africa’s Mediterranean coast — survived the 2013-2014 political crisis and kept advancing.</p> <p>But a new constitution and several free and fair elections failed to deliver the bread, jobs and dignity that Tunisians had chanted for, and the country is now lurching toward disaster, its economy sapped by mismanagement, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>On July 25, the president, Kais Saied, fired his prime minister and suspended Parliament, and he has since consolidated one-man rule. He has swept aside the Constitution, the legislature and the independence of Tunisia’s judiciary and electoral system. Yet those groups that led the country out of the last big political crisis have done nothing more than sound a few muted notes of caution.</p> <p>Image</p> <p>In July, “a lot of Tunisians said, ‘Dictatorship can’t happen here. Civil society is too vibrant,’” said Monica Marks, a Middle East politics professor at New York University in Abu Dhabi who specializes in Tunisia. “But it happened so fast,” she added.</p>

“It’s not that Tunisia’s democracy is threatened. Tunisia’s democracy has been shot in the head,” she said. “So why aren’t they doing anything now?”

Part of the answer lies in the toxic reputation that the country’s young democracy has earned among many Tunisians — not only those who judge their [lives no better than before](#) the revolution, but also activists, journalists and other civil society members who thrived after the uprising.

Members of Parliament and political parties who offered few answers to Tunisia’s problems came to be seen as corrupt and ineffectual, none more so than Ennahda, the Islamist party that has dominated the legislature in the post-revolution era. Judges, though supposedly independent, appeared beholden to the politicians who nominated them.

The media, though free, was mostly owned by businessmen linked to the regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the dictator deposed in 2011. While a handful of oligarchs continued to control much of the economy, corruption and bureaucracy hobbled other Tunisians’ livelihoods.

“It wasn’t as if we were living in some kind of democratic paradise,” said Thameur Mekki, the editor of [Nawaat, an online hub for dissidents](#) under the old regime that evolved into a well-regarded independent media outlet after 2011.

After Mr. Saied’s power grab on July 25, spontaneous celebrations lit up the capital, Tunis, in well-heeled suburbs and poor neighborhoods alike.

Tunisians from many backgrounds saw a potential savior.

Rights activists sought to partner with the president on reforms. Lawyers saw him as a leader with the guts to straighten out the judiciary. Businesspeople calculated that he had the political capital to restructure the economy.

But by Sept. 22, when Mr. Saied began ruling by decree, those hopes were quickly evaporating.

“Nobody wants to go back to the 24th of July,” Mr. Mekki said, “and nobody wants to go to the 26th of July, after everything Kais Saied has done.”

In his campaign to remake Tunisia’s political system, Mr. Saied has dismantled its most important post-revolutionary institutions. After the elected Parliament rejected his actions in a rogue virtual session last month, he simply dissolved it.

Before a planned referendum in July, when Mr. Saied will try to gain approval to rewrite the 2014 Constitution and strengthen the presidency, he announced last month that he would replace most of the independent electoral authority’s members with his own appointees.

This week, he threatened to dissolve political parties altogether, drawing some of the sharpest rebukes yet from civilian watchdogs and the opposition.

Amid all this political turmoil, the government is increasingly unable to pay public salaries. Negotiations over an International Monetary Fund bailout, which would be little more than a stopgap, have stalled. Shortages of staples like flour, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine — a country that supplies Tunisia with much of its wheat — are pushing prices past what many can afford.

At the bakeries, prices are up, baguettes are shorter and long lines form daily. The government recently announced that it would raise fuel prices for the third time this year.

“People are getting sick of the country collapsing. We’re eating half as much bread now,” said Naziha Krir, 44, a house cleaner who said late last month that she had just paid twice what she used to for three loaves at a bakery in Tunis.

“The country has gotten worse and worse” under Mr. Saied, she added.

Polls show the president bleeding support, though he remains by far Tunisia’s most trusted leader. This winter was the first in years when mass protests did not convulse the country.

Tunisians are wavering between what they see as two evils.

“Who can we hold accountable?” said Nawres Zoghbu Douzi, 25, a rights activist. “There’s no real government, no parliament. Who can you go to now?”

Tunisians generally cite just a single gain from the revolution: freedom of expression. But that, too, is now under threat.

The country is still a long way from the dictatorship years, when people feared talking politics even with friends and when a government office dictated journalists’ story lines. But opposition voices have nearly disappeared from state television. And Tunisian journalists are self-censoring as Mr. Saied attacks the news media in speeches, said Fahem Boukadous, executive director of the journalists’ union.

The government has turned increasingly to military courts to prosecute lawmakers and others for criticizing the president, mounting about twice as many such prosecutions since July 25 as in the entire previous decade, according to an analysis by Ms. Douzi’s organization.

“In reality, there’s no freedom of speech,” said Mohamed Ali Bouchiba, 45, a lawyer who defends people on trial in military courts over anti-Saied Facebook posts.

Judges, too, are falling back under the presidency’s sway as Mr. Saied replaces members of the formerly independent judicial oversight body with his own appointees.

Many Tunisians said that they expect the impasse to be broken by U.G.T.T., the storied general labor union that helped shepherd Tunisia to independence from France in 1956 and spearheaded the Nobel-winning dialogue that preserved the constitutional system during the 2013-2014 political crisis.

With more than a million members, the union could single-handedly paralyze the country with strikes.

But analysts and activists say public opinion has kept U.G.T.T., and other leading civil society groups, from more forcefully opposing Mr. Saied.

Reluctant to confront a popular president, the union at first hoped to influence his negotiations with the I.M.F., which will probably require Tunisia to freeze public wages and take other measures painful for union members.

Though U.G.T.T. has gotten tougher on the president, it maintains what Sami Aouadi, its chief economist, called “a position of critical support.”

Mr. Aouadi said U.G.T.T. had resolved to push Mr. Saied toward talks to resolve the political crisis. But the dialogue it has in mind seems far from the inclusive discussions of 2013: Mr. Aouadi said Ennahda should be excluded, echoing a common refrain that holds the Islamist party mostly responsible for the destruction of the economy through corruption and mismanagement.

Other opposition leaders say that ignoring the country’s largest political party would disenfranchise Tunisia’s significant Islamist constituency.

	<p>Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, a secular opposition leader, is looking to build an anti-Saied coalition.</p> <p>“I’m trying to find common ground with Ennahda because we should look forward, not backward,” he said.</p> <p>In the end, he said, Tunisians would probably have to accept Ennahda’s participation in any kind of a political resolution.</p> <p>If economic disaster looms, he predicted, “People won’t have much of a choice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 US diplomats return embassy Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-us-embassy-kyiv-diplomats-returning-russia-victory-day/
GIST	<p><i>Washington</i> — A group of American diplomats returned to the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv for the first time in nearly three months on Sunday, traveling to the Ukrainian capital one day before Russia's Victory Day commemorations, when the country marks the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.</p> <p>"Just arrived in Kyiv! Delighted to be back on Victory in Europe Day. Slava Ukraini! We #standwithUkraine," Kristina Kvien, the U.S. charges d'affair, wrote on the embassy's Twitter account. The U.S. and the West celebrate the end of World War II in Europe on May 8, while Russia and many former Soviet republics recognize May 9 as the end of the war.</p> <p>The U.S. diplomats' return to the embassy was meant to underscore Russian President Vladimir Putin's failure to capture the Ukrainian capital early in the conflict, which has now transformed into a grinding war of attrition in the country's south and east. State Department sources said the embassy hopes to fully resume operations at the embassy in Kyiv and raise the American flag there in the coming weeks.</p> <p>The move is part of the U.S. effort to counteract Russian propaganda surrounding the conflict, which the U.S. expects to see from the Kremlin on May 9, one U.S. official told CBS News.</p> <p>"The Russians will do everything they can to use the date in terms of their propaganda effort," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters last Monday. "I am quite confident you'll be hearing more from the United States, from our partners, including our NATO partners, in the lead-up to May 9 as well."</p> <p>Putin falsely claims that the invasion of Ukraine — what he has called an ongoing "special military operation" — is an effort to remove Nazis from power there.</p> <p>The Biden administration withdrew American diplomats from Kyiv on February 12 in order to avoid the risk of potential fatalities that would threaten to draw the U.S. directly into the conflict.</p> <p>U.S. diplomats were evacuated first to the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, closer to the border with NATO ally Poland, ahead of Russia's invasion on February 24, and then taken out of the country as the war intensified. Embassy staff began making day trips back to Lviv early last week in order to be able to work with Ukrainian counterparts from there. Russian forces pulled back from Kyiv and the surrounding region at the beginning of April.</p> <p>President Biden joined a call with the leaders of the Group of 7 countries on Sunday, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy participating. The U.S. announced new sanctions targeting Russia for its invasion, and the G-7 nations committed to "phase out our dependency on Russian energy, including by phasing out or banning the import of Russian oil," the countries said in a joint statement after the call.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Wildlife 'catastrophic' risks to power grids?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wildlife-pose-catastrophic-risks-power-grids-experts/story?id=84427141

Sometimes Mother Nature and modern technology just don't mix -- especially when it comes to the nation's power grids.

Gusty winds knock down power lines and spark wildfires. Vegetation surrounding the substations catch fire. Severe winter storms cause mayhem at substations, bringing freezing conditions to regions with infrastructure not built to withstand frigid temperatures. And these threats are expected to worsen as the number of severe weather events continue to climb due to climate change.

But the risks posed by nature don't end with natural disasters. Wildlife also poses a significant threat to power grids, experts told ABC News.

"Animals also play a role in the reliability of the overall power system," Drew McGuire, the director of substations, distribution and environment research at the Electric Power Research Institute, a non-profit energy research and development organization, told ABC News. "We typically see this in distribution in the lower voltages that you would typically see in neighborhoods and things like that in in substations."

One of the biggest ways animals disrupt the flow of electricity to households is by breaking into electrical substations, Luis Puigcerver, a senior product manager for wildlife and asset protection at TE Connectivity, a technology company that designs and manufactures connectors and sensors, told ABC News.

Once critters such as squirrels, rats, raccoons and even snakes get into the substation, all they have to do is touch two pieces of bare metal to conduct a surge, Puigcerver said. Just the slightest touch could cause a flashover, which involves electricity running through the animal from one electrical bare connection to another or to a grounded position, he added.

"They're sitting on a piece of metal that that's either grounded or electrified, and then they touch their pop of their nose," Puigcerver said. "And sometimes they don't even have to touch and get very close to it and it'll bridge the gap -- literally cause that electricity to jump from the metal through the body of the creature and then short itself out."

What results is a small explosion that leaves the animal burned electrocuted and causes damage to the substation and outages to sometimes thousands of households, Puigcerver said. Sometimes, the animal can even catch fire, he said.

"It could be catastrophic," he said. "In some areas, I've seen a small little 12-inch squirrel, blow up a \$2 million-plus transformer."

Birds, especially birds of prey with large wingspans, pose the second more significant threat to power grids, Alex Mackewich, Power Line Sentry, a company that designs power protection solutions to prevent power outages and wildlife deaths, told ABC News.

Power poles in the U.S. typically are made with wooden poles and three wires as conductors. While it's a common sight to see flocks of smaller birds sitting safely on one wire, the danger is present when the birds are able to touch two different charges as once.

Squirrels and sometimes snakes can also climb onto the wires and cause this damage, but in North America, birds are typically the culprits, Puigcerver said. Bald eagles especially love to perch on top of the poles to hunt for prey, but when it takes off with its 6-foot wingspan and touches multiple bare wires, that electric surge will then flow right through it, he said.

Then, if it falls to the ground onto dry vegetation, it could spark a wildfire, Mackewich said.

Animals have proven problematic in the past.

In March, a bird that flew into an electrical substation was blamed for taking out power for nearly 10,000 customers in New Orleans.

A slug was blamed for cutting power for nearly 10,000 riders of two dozen high-speed trains in Japan in 2019. A weasel was the cause of a similar shutdown of Europe's Large Hadron Collider in 2016.

Squirrels, which have been such a problem in the past that the American Public Power Association tracks squirrel-caused blackouts with its Squirrel Index, are thought to be more dangerous to power grids than Russian hackers. In 1987, a stray squirrel was blamed for shutting down the NASDAQ for 82 minutes, thwarting the trade of an estimated 20 million shares.

The data about the number of outages in the past caused by wildlife is likely underrepresented as technology advances and tracking methods improve, Mackewich said.

Sometimes turning the power back on is as simple as resetting some of the lines so the power can be redirected. Other times, customers can be without power for hours or even days as crews work to repair the damage, Puigcerver said.

Officials will need to ensure the infrastructure is sound as the world begins to rely less on fossil fuels and more on electricity, Mackewich said. Most of the structures in the U.S. are at least 50 years old, and there are many that are more than 100 years old, she said. Power grids are not only subject to a demand they likely were not built for, but climate change continues to threaten the grids.

The ultimate "failsafe" is to create underground lines that are protected from the elements, Puigcerver said. But burying the power lines underground is expensive and requires extensive planning around the topography of the land.

Utility companies spend a lot of time thinking about how to mitigate potential impacts and how to do so in a cost-effective way, McGuire said.

Three types of technology are used to prevent outages, he said. Insulation products, covers that companies would use to cover power lines and transformer metal connectors, act to prevent an animal such as a squirrel or a bird from making contact with an energized component. Isolation products, something like a fence or spikes, are installed to prevent birds from perching, and discs are used in similar ways at substations. And hazing products, products that are meant to discourage animals from entering the general area, include flight diverters or a plastic owl, and, in some cases, noise machines, McGuire said.

TE Connectivity has created plastic materials designed to withstand the rigors of pollution, ultraviolet rays and electrical activity, some which cover critical areas such as bare wires and transformer metal connectors to prevent accidents on power lines and substations, Puigcerver said.

"And that's why these devices that you put up from a maintenance standpoint and from a reliability standpoint, come into play afterwards," he said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Costa Rica new leader takes over
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/costa-ricas-leader-takes-blast-past-84578131
GIST	<p>SAN JOSE, Costa Rica -- Rodrigo Chaves began a four-year term as Costa Rica's president on Sunday, taking office with a lengthy list of reproaches for his predecessor and the country's political class while promising great change.</p> <p>Shortly after being given the ceremonial presidential sash by outgoing President Carlos Alvarado Quesada, Chaves lashed out at the state of the nation he has been left to lead, complaining of the high cost of living, crime, drug trafficking and long lines at social security offices.</p>

“Not only are we going to put the house in order, we are going to rebuild it!” he vowed. “This is the sign of our times. It is the urgency for change that cannot be delayed, the cry of a democracy that we will not let disappear!”

He warned that “if the political class fails one more time, the country could fall apart.”

He dismissed the idea he said was held by many that the Central American nation is “ungovernable.”

“Look at me as I am, a humble instrument to comply with the mandate of the people, a people who united can achieve the urgent change that history imposes on us,” he said in his inaugural address at the national legislature.

The conservative economist, who was briefly finance minister under Alvarado, had cast himself as the outsider in the race, noting that his Social Democratic Progress Party had never won at any level before this year.

The World Bank veteran is hardly a newcomer to the establishment, but in the April 3 election he defeated a man who was almost a symbol of it: José María Figueres, a former president and son of a three-time president.

Chaves may find governing difficult, however: His party has only 10 of 57 seats in the legislature.

During his campaign he called for lowering the cost of living and after winning, he promised — without giving details — to start with the costs of gasoline, rice and electricity.

Chaves won despite being dogged by a scandal that drove him out of the World Bank, where he was accused of sexual harassment by multiple women, was eventually demoted and then resigned. He has denied the accusations.

Costa Rica has enjoyed relative democratic stability compared with other countries in the region, but the public has grown frustrated with public corruption scandals and high unemployment.

Alvarado's party was almost obliterated during elections in February, receiving no seats in the new congress.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Russia loss extraordinary number generals
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-suffered-loss-extraordinary-number-generals/story?id=84545931
GIST	<p>During its war in Ukraine, Russia's top military leadership has proven to be particularly vulnerable, experts say.</p> <p>Ukraine's Ministry of Defense has claimed that 12 Russian generals have been killed since the invasion began in late February.</p> <p>Russian officials have not confirmed that number. U.S. officials -- who last week pushed back on a New York Times report that said the U.S. provided Ukraine intelligence that helped it target and kill Russian generals and other senior officers -- also have not confirmed the number of Russian generals killed.</p> <p>Though, as reported by Ukraine, that kind of loss is "quite extraordinary," ABC News contributor and retired Col. Steve Ganyard said.</p> <p>"Maybe you'd have to go back to World War II to have that sort of proportion of senior officers being killed on the front lines," Ganyard said.</p> <p>Lack of confidence in troops</p>

Such a high number of casualties at that level suggests several things -- one being a lack of confidence among Russian military leaders in their troops, according to Ganyard.

"It suggests that the generals need to be at the front lines to ensure that their troops are conducting the battle plan in the way that they want," he said. "But that also suggests a lack of confidence in their troops if they need to be that far forward with that many senior folks."

That demonstrates Russia's seriousness about its campaign but is also "an indication of how weak the Russian military has turned out to be in that they need that much senior leadership that far forward," Ganyard said.

Russian generals also may be especially vulnerable due to the structure of Russia's military, experts say.

Unlike the U.S. military, Russia does not empower its non-commissioned and junior officers with the authority to make decisions on their own, said Mick Mulroy, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East and an ABC News contributor.

"They do not delegate authority. So, they are out giving orders directly to their forces," Mulroy said. "The lack of delegation is another reason the Russian military is performing so poorly."

Poor morale among Russian troops may also be giving Ukraine an advantage in the war, despite Ukrainians being outnumbered by enemy troops and military equipment, Ganyard said.

"As soon as communication breaks down ... the young folks in the Russian military don't know what to do and they know that they're just being told to do something, particularly when it's a fight where their heart isn't in it," he said. "That is an advantage that Ukraine has proven to be decisive on the battlefield thus far."

Vulnerable command and control capabilities

Russian troops have also been shown to be vulnerable to electronic eavesdropping while on the ground in Ukraine, Ganyard said.

"One of the many failures of the Russian military in this war is that it has shown how little they have invested in command and control capabilities," he said. "The Russians aren't even using encryption, so it means that anybody -- if they find the frequency -- are able to listen in."

There are "very credible reports" of Russian troops even confiscating phones from Ukrainian citizens and using those for command and control operations, Ganyard said.

"So obviously, the Ukrainians can tap into their own phone lines if they can figure out who's doing it," he said.

Russian soldiers have also been tracked in real-time through geolocation of social media posts, Ganyard said.

"The modern age has introduced lots of benefits, but in the case of the military, it actually becomes dangerous because most of the apps that people are running are not encrypted and they're passing real-time data of where people are," he said.

Tracking Russian troops could lead Ukrainian forces to command posts -- and likely top military leadership.

"If you shell and you take out a command post, you're probably going to take out quite a bit of senior leadership," Ganyard said.

Amid the claims of Russia's military leadership losses, it is unclear what the Ukrainian military has similarly suffered.

"The Ukrainians have been very good at controlling the narrative on social media and on media in general," Ganyard said. "We're getting anecdotal reporting back-channel that the Ukrainians are paying a price, too."

And with a smaller military, the Ukrainians "can pay a price less than the Russians can," he added.

"The Ukrainians are hurting," Ganyard said. "This is not something where the Ukrainians are not taking any losses, while the Russians are."

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HEADLINE	05/07 Some conditions of US dams kept a 'secret'
SOURCE	https://news.wttw.com/2022/05/07/condition-some-us-dams-kept-secret-national-database
GIST	<p>Americans wondering whether a nearby dam could be dangerous can look up the condition and hazard ratings of tens of thousands of dams nationwide using an online database run by the federal government.</p> <p>But they won't find the condition of Hoover Dam, which impounds one the nation's largest reservoirs on the border of Nevada and Arizona. Nor is there any condition listed for California's Oroville Dam, the country's tallest, which underwent a \$1 billion makeover after its spillway failed.</p> <p>Details about the conditions of these and other prominent dams are kept secret from the public, listed as "not available" in the National Inventory of Dams.</p> <p>The lack of publicly available data about potentially hazardous dams has raised concern among some experts.</p> <p>"These structures impact people, and this is what we're obviously most worried about. So it is important to share this information," said Del Shannon, a Colorado-based engineer who has assessed hundreds of dams and is president of the U.S. Society on Dams.</p> <p>For much of the past couple of decades, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers declined to reveal the conditions of dams in the National Inventory of Dams — which it maintains — citing security concerns stemming from the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.</p> <p>But in a move toward greater transparency, the Corps launched an updated website late last year that includes hazard ratings and condition assessments for more than one-quarter of the roughly 92,000 structures.</p> <p>Yet the status of many dams remains a mystery. That's because some federal agencies failed to update their data. The Corps also allowed federal agencies and states to restrict the release of information about the dams they oversee, and some continue to do so citing terrorism concerns.</p> <p>The Associated Press used information obtained by public records requests to states to supplement data in the National Inventory of Dams, tallying over 2,200 high-hazard dams that are in poor or unsatisfactory condition in 48 states and Puerto Rico. But the conditions remain unknown for more than 4,600 high-hazard dams that could cause a loss of life if they fail.</p> <p>Dam conditions typically are categorized as satisfactory, fair, poor or unsatisfactory.</p> <p>In the Corps' database, nearly two-thirds of the 18 federal entities that own or oversee dams provided no condition assessments. That includes the largest federal regulator of dams, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which oversees more than 1,750 dams in 42 states. A FERC spokeswoman said the agency is overhauling its assessment process and intends to have conditions available this summer.</p>

The Corps also declined to include condition assessments for the roughly 740 dams it owns, which include some of the largest in the nation. Instead, the agency posted its own “risk assessments,” ranging from “very low” to “very high.”

Garrison Dam, which constrains the Missouri River in North Dakota to form one of the nation’s largest reservoirs, is described in the database as “safe” but “high risk.” The Corps says the dam’s failure could trigger a cascading failure of downstream dams resulting “in swift, deep, and life-threatening flooding in numerous communities.”

No other entity uses the Corps’ risk-rating system, making it hard to compare the Corps’ dams to others. The Corps said it uses the risk categories to make repairs “in the most effective manner within a constrained budget.”

“The risk assessment information that we’re sharing is actually better information to help people be prepared for a potential issue at a dam,” said Rebecca Ragon, the Corps’ National Inventory of Dams manager.

The AP’s review also found that some federal departments lack consistent policies for releasing dam data. The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — both part of the U.S. Department of Interior — disclosed hazard and condition details for their dams.

But the department’s Bureau of Reclamation, which oversees 430 dams in the West, denied the AP’s public records request for dam conditions, citing a legal exemption for “information compiled for law enforcement purposes.” The bureau said in an email that disclosing dam conditions “would compromise the protection of our facilities and allow targeted attacks of critical infrastructure.”

Data from some states is also limited or missing.

Alabama has no agency to regulate dams, so there are no condition or hazard ratings for its roughly 2,200 dams.

Illinois doesn’t assign condition ratings, because lumping dams into categories “is terribly subjective” and doesn’t “have enough value to justify the resources that it takes to do it,” said state dam safety engineer Paul Mauer Jr. However, the state works with dam owners to make needed repairs.

New Jersey and Texas provided AP a total number of poor or unsatisfactory high-hazard dams but did not identify them by name. New Jersey has not released dam conditions but plans to do so by the end of May under a recent policy change. Texas declined to release hazard classifications, citing a state law that keeps confidential the “technical details” of critical infrastructure that’s vulnerable to terrorism.

The National Inventory of Dams contains neither the hazard classification nor a condition for the Rockwall-Forney Dam, which impounds Lake Ray Hubbard to supply water to more than 1 million people in the Dallas area.

A 2021 inspection document provided to the AP by Dallas shows the dam is classified as high hazard and has several issues, including a fractured floodgate and a large void in the rocks lining the left side. A more in-depth inspection report isn’t complete.

Though an overall condition assessment is not available, “none of these things are of immediate concern,” said Sally U. Mills-Wright, assistant director for water production at Dallas Water Utilities.

Without access to information, it’s hard for the public to verify that.

Because dam failures carry big consequences, the public should be made aware of a dam’s hazard rating and what lies in its downstream flood zone, said Travis Attanasio, a former dam inspector who is president-elect of the Texas section of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

	“You may not necessarily be in flood plain, but if a dam were to break, you could still be facing a lot of water,” he said.
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HEADLINE	05/08 Abortion rights protesters rally in cities
SOURCE	https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/abortion-rights-protesters-rally-in-cities-around-u-s
GIST	<p>CHICAGO (AP) — Abortion rights protesters rallied in cities around the United States on Saturday, vowing to fight to ensure that abortion remains a legal option for women nationwide.</p> <p>Hundreds gathered in Chicago, Atlanta, Houston and other cities days after a draft U.S. Supreme Court opinion was leaked to the public suggesting the court is poised to overturn the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade case that legalized abortion nationwide. The draft opinion, which comes amid nearly 50 years of federal abortion protections, could change before the ruling is finalized in coming weeks.</p> <p>“To think that, after all this time, people still want to control what women can do and our rights to make our personal healthcare decisions is just really outrageous,” Carole Levin, chair of Courts Matter Illinois, told WMAQ-TV during the rally in Chicago.</p> <p>Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker attended the rally and vowed to protect reproductive rights in Illinois.</p> <p>“I’m proud Illinois is an island for reproductive freedom in the Midwest,” he said. “Our shores remain open for any person left marooned by these extremist politicians.”</p> <p>In the nation’s capital, abortion rights protesters stood outside the Supreme Court, holding signs that said abortion is a human right, or “Abort the Court.” Protesters who oppose abortion demonstrated across the street.</p> <p>In Atlanta, demonstrators carried signs in favor of abortion rights as they marched through that city’s downtown and chanted, “Not the church and not the state, women must decide our fate.”</p> <p>In Houston, thousands attended a reproductive rights rally headlined by Democrat Beto O’Rourke, who is running for Texas governor. Texas is one of several states that would automatically ban abortion, leaving no exceptions for rape or incest, if the high court overturns the nationwide right to abortion.</p> <p>An investigation is underway to determine who leaked the Supreme Court draft opinion to Politico.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Snohomish Co. ‘plateau’ women in policing
SOURCE	https://www.heraldnet.com/news/snohomish-county-in-line-with-plateau-of-women-on-police-staffs/
GIST	<p>EDMONDS — Police departments in Snohomish County severely underrepresent women, even as research shows they often make for better officers, according to a Daily Herald analysis.</p> <p>Only one department, Edmonds, has one-third of its staff made up of women — counting both civilian employees and sworn officers. Most others hover around one-quarter. And only one out of 19 Mill Creek police department employees was a woman.</p> <p>At the biggest agency, the Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office, 22% of employees were women. Everett was just over 23%. Out of 15 hires last year in Everett, eight were women.</p> <p>Women and girls make up about half of the county’s population, according to Census estimates.</p> <p>“Wouldn’t it be outstanding to have 50% of our officers be women, since 50% of the population is women?” Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin told the Herald. “So what do we need to do to recruit that so we can look like the community we’re serving?”</p>

There are a lot of reasons for the continued underrepresentation, experts note. Those include an overemphasis on upper body strength that can disadvantage women in the hiring process; a police culture resisting the shift; and a lack of family-friendly policies. Another is the lack of women already in the field to show female applicants they can do it, too.

In Edmonds, police Cpl. Brittany Harris, who works in hiring for the department, said she has been treated like any other officer. Still, she sees a lot of hesitancy in prospective female candidates. They sometimes worry about the traditionally male-dominated workforce.

“If they walk into a department and all they see is a bunch of old white men, that’s not going to look the same to them,” she told the Herald.

But once a department hires more women, they can “see themselves there in that role,” Harris said. Notably, Edmonds is the only agency in the county with a [female police chief](#). A woman also serves as one of the department’s assistant chiefs.

The Herald compiled police demographics via public records requests of every agency based in the county, except for Bothell, which straddles King and Snohomish counties. Most of the statistics were current as of Jan. 1. And the records include not just officers, but also civilian employees. Women are much more likely to be represented in those civilian jobs than patrol positions.

The same records also showed [many departments are disproportionately white](#) compared to the populations they cover.

The Herald’s reporting was spurred by an email.

“Please help our citizens to be heard and fairly represented,” a Herald reader wrote in December.

It was only a few decades ago that seeing women on patrol began to be more accepted. In 1968, the first two women were [assigned to patrol alongside their male colleagues in the country](#). That followed federal legislation outlawing gender discrimination in public agencies, like police departments.

State Sen. John Lovick, D-Mill Creek, remembers his state trooper training class in 1975. It kicked off his 31 years with the Washington State Patrol and included the first female trooper cadets, Carol Pemberton and Cathy Swanson.

“They just brought a different approach to it,” said Lovick, who also served as Snohomish County sheriff. “I’m not saying that men are not compassionate, but they just had a more compassionate approach to policing. What I mean is ... a more diverse agency could change the culture of policing.”

Last year, state patrol Chief John Batiste wrote that [Swanson and Pemberton](#) “pushed open a door that others would march through.” But within four months on the job, they quit, according to a [news report](#). Reacting to the news, the chief at the time, Will Bachofner, said law enforcement was “no life for a young, married woman.”

Monica Alexander remembers her 23 years with state patrol fondly. She loved working with the community. But she recognizes it was probably easier for her male colleagues. Alexander had to approach leadership herself for a job as a soon-to-be single mother. Eventually, she also had to advocate for a promotion when no one else would.

“I find it to be all of our responsibility, not only to recruit, but to be able to retain and seek talent in everyone,” said Alexander, now the executive director of the state Criminal Justice Training Commission. “We have to take our blinders and our goggles off in order to do that.”

Some scholars expected more gender parity at this point, half a century into the push to increase the number of women in law enforcement. For example, just a few years after Swanson and Pemberton began and ended their patrol careers, police scholar Catherine Milton predicted [half of all police officers would be women within a few decades](#). And yet the country remains far short of that goal.

In fact, the number of women in law enforcement has [stagnated](#) across the country. As of 2018, women made up [less than 27% of all police department employees nationwide](#), according to federal data pulling from more than 13,000 agencies. Over 60% of civilian employees were women, but just 12.6% of all officers. And they constituted an even smaller portion of department leadership.

“It’s very fair to say we’ve reached a plateau,” said Dr. Cara Rabe-Hemp, an Illinois State University professor who researches policing and gender.

Snohomish County police agencies are not an exception when it comes to representation for women.

At the Washington State Patrol, women made up only about a third of all employees, according to an [agency report submitted to lawmakers last November](#). As for commissioned troopers, only one in every ten was a woman.

Departments covering cities and counties with bigger populations were slightly more likely to have more women. And across the country, 27% of police department employees in suburban areas were women in 2018.

“A lot of what officers do is they’re coming in contact with people in crisis, people on their worst day,” said Franklin, the mayor of Everett. “And women might be able to relate to parts of our population, certainly 50% of our population, better. Considering if you’re in a crisis as a woman, you probably feel safer interacting with a woman.”

Some [studies show](#), however, that women detectives [may not be more sensitive](#) or less aggressive than men in [interactions with survivors](#). But another analysis found that a greater number of women in a police department is connected to [higher reporting rates of sexual violence](#) and higher clearance rates for those cases.

Some experts say increasing gender parity could lead to less police violence. One study out of Illinois State University found women were [27% less likely to use threats, physical restraints and other tactics in interactions with civilians](#), compared to their male colleagues.

“Empirically, we know that women are less likely to use excessive force against citizens, and this results in more peaceful citizen-police relationships,” said Rabe-Hemp, the author of that study.

Another study of traffic stops in Florida and North Carolina found women conducted searches at a [much lower rate than men](#). Yet when they did conduct searches, they were still more likely to find contraband.

There’s an ongoing push nationwide to get more women into policing. The [30×30 Initiative](#) aims to have 30% of police recruits be women by 2030. The Seattle and Tacoma police departments, as well as the state patrol, have committed to the initiative’s pledge to identify obstacles to advancing women in this field.

As the first woman elected mayor of Everett, Franklin has felt the importance of representation firsthand. Growing up, she didn’t know women could be mayors.

“Every image I ever saw, every person on TV, every book I read, it was an older white man who was the mayor. Go back and read all your children’s books, that’s what you’ll see,” she said. “So how in the world did I think that I could be mayor someday? I didn’t.”

And in her recruiting in Edmonds, Harris uses her experience to show applicants it’s possible to balance home and work lives. She was ready to get back to patrol, but when she told her bosses she was pregnant

	<p>they were able to move her into a more accommodating position, addressing a concern of many women considering a police career.</p> <p>If departments and the broader law enforcement culture can address these obstacles that keep women out, it could result in better policing, Rabe-Hemp argued.</p> <p>“Having a diverse police force, one that’s representative of the communities that they have sworn to protect and to serve, is an advantage,” she said. “No doubt.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Black police, blue line: institutional racism
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/black-tacoma-police-officer-challenged-institutional-racism/
GIST	<p>TACOMA — Valencia Brooks sat in the back row of the 1 p.m. shift-change meeting at the Tacoma Police Department. Among the usual announcements about wanted suspects to look out for, she heard this: “You can probably find him with one of his hoes.”</p> <p>Silence gripped the room. Brooks’ supervisor, seated beside her, glanced to see Brooks — the only Black woman in the room — with a blank reaction.</p> <p>Inside, she was seething. But over the course of 30 years at the Tacoma Police Department, she’d become practiced at swallowing her rage in the face of what she saw as racism: this time, a white sergeant using a slang pejorative for prostitutes to refer to Black women who were accused of simply knowing a Black suspect.</p> <p>“If I would have reacted, then I would have reaffirmed the racist stereotype of African American women that were depicted in the departmental cultural diversity training,” she said.</p> <p>Brooks filed a complaint with the department’s Equal Employment Opportunity Office, one of 18 she lodged against fellow officers for a litany of allegations over two decades, including a hate crime allegedly covered up, training on racist stereotypes that only served to reinforce them, and tolerance for personnel associating with a white supremacist hate group.</p> <p>Virtually all the complaints were rejected. But Brooks believed this one, from the meeting in March 2019, seemed promising.</p> <p>The sergeant, after all, allegedly used the term in a room full of cops, whose professional standards require them to “give careful attention.” But finding a straight answer proved more difficult than Brooks had expected.</p> <p>As police departments across the country have been confronted with allegations that their practices widen divides with communities they police, Brooks says she had a front-row seat to what she says is the root of the problem in Tacoma: tolerated discrimination inside the blue line.</p> <p>Even as Tacoma police leaders pledged their commitment to racial equity, she took careful notes and kept voluminous records of incidents, sometimes providing investigators corroborating witnesses. “It felt like a part-time job,” said Brooks, who retired last year.</p> <p>Brooks, 55, provided The Seattle Times more than 340 pages detailing her internal complaints and the Tacoma Police Department’s responses to them. A city spokesperson declined to answer questions about Brooks’ complaints, citing the privacy of the accused officers.</p> <p>Brooks wasn’t alone. Interviews with Black former officers and a Seattle Times review of Tacoma records — including internal complaints, hiring and retention data and surveys of city employees — show a</p>

department prioritizing but struggling to hire more Black officers, even as it consistently rejected complaints of racism from the few it had.

Tacoma's first Black police chief, Avery Moore, started the job in February. Moore, currently one of 16 Black officers on a force of 316, inherited an overwhelmingly white Police Department whose historically strained relationship with Tacoma's Black community was made worse by the police killing of Manuel Ellis, a 33-year-old Black man, in March 2020.

It resulted in extraordinary criminal charges against three of Brooks' former colleagues. The officers, who have all pleaded not guilty and are awaiting trial, remain employed by TPD.

Black men in Tacoma are six times more likely than white men to be subjected to police use of force, and they are far more likely to be ticketed, according to an independent study released last year, although the findings are limited by what researchers described as "systemic" gaps in data collection.

Within city government, Black employees and managers said "the dominant culture is to avoid confrontation" and some reported a fear of retaliation, according to a city staff survey last year.

"If you raise concerns, you are the outsider," Brooks said. "You are the problem."

Nearly all of her complaints against fellow officers were evaluated by then-Capt. Fred Scruggs, head of TPD's Equal Employment Opportunity Office, where complaints of harassment and discrimination are routed. He was one of the few longtime Black members of the department to climb its ranks.

None of Brooks' claims was deemed to be "unfounded," but most "did not rise to the level" of a violation. Each time, the department's chief backed their rulings.

Scruggs said he gave Brooks' complaints fair consideration with help from city legal advisers. "My job was making sure every complaint was handled, that it didn't go away, it was addressed in some kind of manner and [complainants] were notified of the results."

In evaluating the use of "hoes" at the shift change meeting, Scruggs emailed every officer and supervisor present. Sixteen said they heard no such thing. Even Sgt. John Branham, who was accused of making the remark, later told investigators he couldn't remember if he had used the term "hoes," but admitted he "might have," because he liked to "keep it light" at meetings, according to the EEO report.

One officer, seated in the front row, confirmed it, and took great offense — not to Branham's alleged comment, but to Brooks' objections. Officers "need to feel comfortable enough to be ourselves. Having our guard up every hour, even while working, causes strain on the psychology of an officer," he said.

In the end, three of the 19 people questioned, including Brooks, confirmed the use of the term, their emails with Scruggs showed.

Scruggs ruled that the use of the term "did not rise to the level" of a policy violation, without further explanation.

Brooks said she felt betrayed by her squad's responses to Scruggs' questions and doubly so by her department's acceptance of their answers. Her squadmates became more distant. Her own partner, whom she'd long considered a friend, began avoiding her altogether.

In an email to her supervisor after the ruling, Brooks asked to be reassigned, citing the rejection of her complaint and what she alleged was "untruthfulness" and "racial bias" of some of her colleagues.

"We all know what is at stake when officers are willing to lie, conspire to cover up the truth and have a racial bias," she wrote.

“Overcome evil with good”

Brooks sat transfixed in the TV glow of 1970s and ‘80s police dramas during her childhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

It was the quirky gumshoe Columbo, and later the odd couple Cagney and Lacey, that served up justice in her childhood living room. They inspired an epiphany around middle school: Brooks wanted to be like those do-gooder officers on TV.

From then on, Brooks reached for that dream: Straight from high school to the military, then, in 1989, Tacoma police officer.

She quickly learned TPD was nothing like TV. She was soon named in a lawsuit along with a large group of officers accused of wrongful arrest. She was ultimately dropped from the suit, but not before watching officers and city attorneys conduct “strategy sessions” in the catacombs of Tacoma’s municipal building so they could match up their stories, she said.

In 1994, she quit TPD and went back to Michigan, working in public safety in Kalamazoo. But a bit bored, and still wanting to make a difference, she returned to the Tacoma police in 1996.

This time, instead of walking away when those hopes faded, Brooks stayed on and deputized herself the department’s unofficial conscience.

After a decade on the force, being mistaken for other Black women by her fellow officers over and over, observing casual racism by officers, Brooks began to file complaints.

Brooks herself was the target of two internal complaints resulting in reprimand — one for filing a complaint against an officer in another department whom she dated, causing her supervisor to doubt her motives; and another for rudeness.

In the latter, Brooks helped a Black man move his car’s bumper out of the roadway. The white woman he’d crashed into complained that act amounted to favoritism by Brooks, even though she had ticketed the Black driver.

“Black officers are under a microscope,” Brooks said. “Any sort of misstep, any mistake, is blown up because you stand out so much. If you’re white, you blend in, and so do your mistakes.”

Brooks’ right wrist is tattooed with “Romans 12:21,” a reference to the Bible verse, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

“If I hadn’t wanted to do it since I was a kid, I wouldn’t have lasted nearly as long,” Brooks said. “Even if I couldn’t effect the changes that needed to happen, at least I could be there as a witness to show the concerns of Black people are real. It’s not perceived, it’s real.”

A surprising admission

As she wrapped up her shift around sunrise on Nov. 15, 2000, Brooks’ eardrums were still gently thrumming from her previous shift, providing security for rapper Eminem’s sold-out Tacoma Dome performance.

Brooks was alone in a hospital break room when a fellow Tacoma police officer struck up a chat. They’d never met, but within minutes the officer, Michael Cerniauskas, announced that he had lived with white supremacist skinheads, Brooks stated as part of a later lawsuit. To her, the unsolicited announcement had a clear purpose: intimidation.

Cerniauskas, who is white, also brought up his past association with skinheads in separate conversations with two other Black officers over the ensuing days. In his job application, Cerniauskas said that when he

was 16, he lived with skinheads for a month, but disassociated with them “after he learned of their full beliefs.”

Tacoma Police Department policy forbids hiring personnel with gang affiliations, and asks whether job candidates have associated with gang members. In his application, obtained by The Seattle Times, Cerniauskas denied associating with gangs, but admitted his association with skinheads.

Cerniauskas had been rejected by the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department and the Washington State Patrol before TPD hired him. A West Point graduate, he was dismissed from the Army under Article 15 for defying an order to not go out drinking, but was honorably discharged and returned as an Army reservist after a decade at TPD.

He was hired in December by the Lakewood Police Department, its chief, Mike Zaro, confirmed. Cerniauskas declined to be interviewed, Zaro said.

Brooks, new to the complaint process at the time, told an assistant chief about her experience with Cerniauskas. But she didn’t submit a written complaint, and her informal complaint was not investigated.

Brooks referred to her conversation with Cerniauskas in a 2005 workplace discrimination lawsuit against the city of Tacoma that a Pierce County judge dismissed.

Internal forces

The police chief during most of Brooks’ time at TPD was Don Ramsdell, who’d taken over in 2003 in the wake of a scandal. His predecessor, David Brame, used his service weapon to kill his wife and then himself in front of their children in a public parking lot.

After the tragedy, it was revealed that Brame had been committing spousal abuse in the months preceding the tragedy, and that city leaders were aware but kept it a secret, preserving his access to the weapon he used in the murder-suicide.

Ramsdell promised sweeping cultural reforms. He said there would be zero tolerance for “all forms of illegal discrimination, harassment and retaliation” in the workplace, with the expectation that employees act with “respect for the diversity of the department’s workforce and the community it serves.”

He specifically cited “telling jokes, using threatening or offensive words” denigrating a protected group. But Ramsdell upheld each of the decisions to reject Brooks’ complaints, including the use of “hoes.” Ramsdell, who retired in late 2020, did not respond to repeated requests for an interview.

More than a decade into Ramsdell’s tenure, TPD had made little to no progress to diversify the force. Department leaders recognized it lagged behind the city’s demographics: During Ramsdell’s tenure, Black officers made up between 4% and 5% of the department, while Black residents made up 11% to 12% of the city’s population.

TPD turned to the U.S. Department of Justice and got a \$3.4 million grant in 2014 to improve diversity and help address “not only illegal discrimination/harassment, but also any conduct that is reasonably considered offensive and/or inappropriate.”

Prioritizing recruitment and hiring of diverse officers, Tacoma contracted with an ad agency to drum up interest from underrepresented communities.

But after eight years there’s little to show for it. Black representation in the department peaked at 21 in 2017, out of 336, but has since fallen, according to department data.

To Brooks, the solution was clear: Before recruiting more Black officers, TPD had to treat its few Black officers better.

She filed an EEO complaint in 2015 about the ads featuring Black officers while they were still on probation and who were not ultimately hired, a practice championed by Mike Ake, who would serve as interim chief after Ramsdell's retirement. Brooks alleged it made the department appear more diverse than it was. The complaint was rejected.

Ake, now retired, defended his approach to recruitment. "I do appreciate the officers who volunteered to represent us in hiring and community events," he said in an email. "If anyone didn't want to participate, we understood and supported their decision."

In December 2019, a survey of Tacoma municipal employees of color showed their experience mirrored Brooks'. Black city workers shared concerns about recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion; lack of managerial accountability; "overt and subtle acts of racism"; and a sense of isolation.

The Police Department promoted people of color "at a rate substantially lower than what was expected," according to a city workforce study assessing 2012 to 2019. Over the same span, people of color left the department at a rate 22% higher than white peers, and women left at a clip 75% higher than men.

"A long distance to travel"

Brooks prevailed just once with a complaint, and only in part. It involved a training video meant to dispel racial and ethnic stereotypes, in which a white woman with blond hair bobbed her head, raised her voice and gestured wildly with her hands as she mimicked a stereotype of Black women. This, she said, is what you might expect when you encounter one on a service call.

In another segment, the same trainer offered an unflattering description of the odors officers could encounter in an Indian household, such as curry. One whiff, the trainer said, and "you know what kind of people you're dealing with."

Brooks immediately filed an EEO complaint. Scruggs ruled the video, produced by Police One Academy, an outside contractor, "in its entirety did not violate" policies, nor did the segment on Indian households. But the segment depicting Black women "dispersed disparaging, inaccurate and inappropriate information," he found, and accepted Brooks' proposed resolution to better screen future training videos.

Brooks today wonders if it was much of a victory at all. She first complained in 2007 about training guidance that she says had ingrained stereotypes about Black men and put officers on an aggressive footing.

An analysis of the department's use of force, released last year, found that although Black men made up about 6% of Tacoma's population from January 2015 through mid-September 2020, one-third of the instances of when police used force were against them. The analysis also found that Black men were ticketed at twice the rate of white men, who outnumbered Black men in Tacoma 5-to-1.

However, Tacoma police policies don't require reports on all uses of force, or require all responding officers to give statements. And officers often failed to collect demographic information on drivers and pedestrians, according to consultants' analyses. In late 2020, the department adopted stronger policies for recording demographic data during officer-initiated stops.

"Ultimately, the [Tacoma Police] Department has a long distance to travel to ensure that force incidents receive a comprehensive, multi-stage, 360-degree review in the manner that many other departments do," according to the report.

Alleged hate crime dismissed

The principal at Meeker Middle School made a grim discovery just before the winter holiday break in 2018.

A white student had circulated a petition with a drawing resembling one of his classmates, a Muslim girl, hanging from a noose with the words “Take back the Holy land, Muslims must die.” And then the boy had presented the petition to the girl and tried to get her to sign it.

Tacoma Police Department, following state law, has clear policies about investigating hate crimes. Yet the white officer who responded, Anthony Wilkerson, followed none of them, according to Brooks’ EEO complaint.

He didn’t notify a supervisor or designate it as a hate crime investigation in his report — instead classifying it as “informational,” according to her complaint. It also alleged that he didn’t refer to the Muslim girl as a victim or even interview her, although he spoke with the boy but didn’t question him about his motive for the petition.

Instead, Wilkerson’s report focused on the boy’s remorse. “He was visibly upset and crying with tears running down his face ... He said that he was sorry for the petition and that he was only trying to be funny, but realizes now that it was hurtful.”

“It was clear that Officer Wilkerson was covering up the incident for the suspect because he was a [white male],” Brooks wrote in her complaint.

Wilkerson, who is still a Tacoma officer, did not respond to requests for comment.

Per TPD policy, Scruggs left the investigation of the complaint to Wilkerson’s supervisor, and then ruled that the officer’s actions did not rise to the level of a policy violation. Ramsdell affirmed it.

Black officers struggle

Scruggs, one of four people of color among the department’s 25 command staff before his retirement last month, may have denied most of Brooks’ complaints, but he acknowledged racism at the department.

“It’s difficult being an African American male in America, period,” said Scruggs who’s spent all of his 34-year career in Tacoma, rising to assistant chief. “There are experiences that we deal with in the workplace and our personal lives that are potentially different than any other race or any other gender in America. Tacoma Police Department is no different.”

Scruggs described a delicate balance for Black police officers, navigating a Black community that tends to view them as “sellouts,” while having to work harder than white peers for recognition.

“The way I see it, as African Americans in the workplace, we often have to fight and struggle just to be noticed,” Scruggs said. “There’s a lot of ways you can do that. You can do it diplomatically, or more vocally.”

Scruggs said he chose the former; Brooks chose the latter. Scruggs said he holds her in high esteem for her outspokenness, while Brooks said she regards him as a guardian of the status quo whose decisions were detrimental to Black officers.

He believes the key to better experiences for Black officers lies in hiring more of them, and “listening to these officers’ experience and understanding and accepting that things are different for us.”

Brooks worries that if the status quo continues, the department’s few Black officers will share her experience, undermining its diversity goals.

“Hopefully I’ve made it better for the next Black female officer to come after me,” Brooks said. “Or maybe there won’t be any more.”

Through a spokesperson, the city of Tacoma’s Human Resources Director Shelby Fritz declined an interview request and refused to answer questions about the quality of the investigations into Brooks’ complaints, citing the city’s privacy policy.

Tacoma does not track or analyze the outcomes of EEO complaints, Fritz said in a written statement, so it couldn't speak to whether Black officers' complaints are dismissed more often than their white peers'.

"This could be done manually," but would be time-consuming and difficult, she said.

Between January 2017 and November 2020, 829 complaints, internal and external, were lodged against Tacoma police employees, most for unsatisfactory performance or discourtesy. Of those, 84 percent were dismissed, according to an analysis commissioned by the city last year. Often, the report found, officers' supervisors dismissed complaints without giving them complete and independent investigations.

"I can't do this anymore"

When the Tacoma Police Department issued Brooks a new vehicle in February 2020, it included a "Thin Blue Line" sticker on its rear end.

To some cops, it can represent standing in the gap between order and chaos or to memorialize fallen officers. Brooks saw it as a divisive symbol. "For many African-Americans, the flag is a racist symbol," Brooks wrote in her Feb. 25, 2020, complaint, one week before Ellis' killing. She asked permission to replace it with the U.S. flag.

It took Scruggs just one day to adjudicate Brooks' complaint: "We will NOT remove the flag from the car," he wrote in an email.

But when the medical examiner in June 2020 ruled Ellis' death in Tacoma police custody a homicide, and public criticism of the decals mounted, Ramsdell ordered the stickers removed from all TPD vehicles. In a written statement at the time, Ramsdell said he was "listening and responding to the community."

It was Brooks' last complaint. On Feb. 1 last year, she parked in a fenced lot behind Tacoma police headquarters around 12:45 p.m. and walked inside, carrying her department-issued laptop.

As Brooks made her way to the women's locker room, she saw Ake, the acting police chief and the target of her unsuccessful complaint about using Black probationary officers in recruiting materials.

Just before she reached the locker room, she ran into Scruggs, and she was reminded of all her complaints he'd rejected.

Inside the locker room, she plopped her laptop down and stopped.

"That's when it hit me. I said, 'I can't do this anymore,'" Brooks recalled.

With her laptop still on the bench, and her uniform jumpsuit still dangling at her waist, she walked out and never looked back.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Inquest into Charleena Lyles shooting
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/inquest-into-fatal-shooting-charleena-lyles-by-seattle-officers-move-forward/N5OKPT55OBHZ5HHV2PCDSPQGDY/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — An inquest to ascertain the facts about the fatal shooting of a woman by two Seattle police officers is moving forward, according to the attorneys representing the victim's family.</p> <p>An inquest into Charleena Lyles' death is set to happen from June 21 to July 1, with an initial pre-hearing in front of the inquest administrators to be held Thursday via Zoom, lawyers for Lyles' family said.</p>

The hearing comes after relatives of family members killed by police won a victory at the Washington State Supreme Court in July 2021. [The court set new rules for conducting inquest hearings](#) — rules the families had pushed for.

An inquest lawsuit was pursued by the families of Lyles, Damarius Butts and Isaiah Obet. They were killed by police officers between April and June of 2017.

The families and representatives of law enforcement battled in court over King County Executive Dow Constantine's orders that reshaped an inquest process that had frustrated families for decades.

The orders established new inquest rules that say a police officer who kills someone can be required to testify at the inquest. Inquest juries can also determine whether officers used criminal means.

On Father's Day in 2017, Lyles, a 30-year-old mother of four, had called police to report a burglary at her apartment.

Officers who arrived at the scene said she lunged at them with a knife before she was fatally shot. Lyles' death sparked outrage and protest, including allegations the shooting was racially motivated because she was African American and was shot by white officers.

As Lyles' family fought to get answers about the shooting and hold the officers accountable, the family had brought a case against the officers. Family members insisted that Lyles had mental health problems and that police failed to de-escalate the situation before shooting her.

In January 2019, [the lawsuit against officers Jason Anderson and Steven McNew was dismissed with prejudice](#) by former King County Superior Court Judge Julie Spector. If a case is dismissed with prejudice, it cannot be refiled.

However, the matter was appealed and reversed on Feb. 16, 2021, and remanded back to Superior Court for a Feb. 7, 2022 trial date.

However, in November 2021, the city of Seattle reached a [\\$3.5 million settlement with Lyles' family](#). In a statement, the city said, in part, "It is indisputable that this has been a tragedy, and we are glad to have some level of closure for the parties."

Regarding the inquest, lawyers representing the family said, "The scope of the inquest is much narrower than the civil suit. We asked that it be broad enough to show a fuller picture of Charleena Lyles' mental health struggles, including the incident where SPD was able to de-escalate her which occurred 10 days before her fatal shooting. This request has been rejected by the city, which consults with the inquest administrator to set the parameters of the proceedings."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Putin: 'Nazi filth' in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/05/08/putin-blasts-nazi-filth-ukraine-victory-day-wwii-remarks/6911652020094/
GIST	<p>May 8 (UPI) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin blasted "Nazi filth" in Ukraine in remarks he made to commemorate Victory Day, the 77th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany.</p> <p>Putin's remarks also noted that he sent congratulatory messages to the Russian appointed heads of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, which together make up the Donbas region, for "fighting shoulder to shoulder for the liberation of their native land."</p> <p>In the last month, Russia has refocused its fighting in the Donbas region, which has largely been held by Russian-backed separatists since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Putin had recognized Donetsk and Luhansk as independent republics in the days before the invasion.</p>

"Today, the common duty is to prevent the revival of Nazism, which brought so much suffering to people from different countries," Putin said in the messages, according to a press release from the Kremlin.

"It is necessary to preserve and pass on to posterity the truth about the events of the war years, common spiritual values and traditions of fraternal friendship."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday met with Bärbel Blas, the president of Germany's parliament, in Kyiv as the countries commemorated the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945.

The visit by Blas was the first by a German official since the countries mended a diplomatic disagreement over a decision by Ukrainian officials last month to uninvite federal president Frank-Walter Steinmeier over his past Russian ties.

During the meeting, Zelensky thanked Germany for supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, according to a press release.

Zelensky and Blas also discussed further assistance to Ukraine and the strengthening of sanctions against Russia as the war continues, as well as the movement toward membership in the European Union.

Putin's comments on Victory Day came as Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, released a video message in which she said that "the Russian invasion of Ukraine reminds us why we are celebrating Europe Day tomorrow."

"My fellow Europeans, today our continent encounters shadows of a past we thought we had long left behind -- an atrocious war, senseless aggression and destroyed cities," von der Leyen said.

"Europe stands at the side of Ukraine. At the same time the Kremlins invasion reminds us why we're celebrating Europe Day -- the day when our peaceful, prosperous and united Europe was born."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also released a video message for Victory Day in which he remembered the Ukrainians who have died during Russia's invasion.

"As we remember those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom and our futures, we also think of those who've died and suffered in Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine," Johnson said.

"Our respect and gratitude to those who have fought in previous conflicts strengthens our determination to support the people of Ukraine in their struggle. We won't forget the sacrifices that have been made over the generations to ensure peace and freedom in Europe."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Civilians evacuate Ukraine steel mill
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war/2022/05/08/id/1068893/
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces kept up their barrage of southern Ukraine, hitting the major Black Sea port of Odesa with cruise missiles and bombarding the steelworks up the coast in Mariupol, where Ukrainian fighters remained trapped underground after the last civilians were brought out to safety.</p> <p>Moscow was aiming to complete its conquest of Mariupol in time for Victory Day celebrations on Monday. But it was facing stiff resistance elsewhere.</p> <p>In a sign of the unexpectedly effective defense that has sustained the fighting into its 11th week, Ukraine's military flattened Russian positions on a Black Sea island that was captured in the war's first days and has become a symbol of resistance.</p>

Western military analysts also said a Ukrainian counteroffensive was advancing around the country's second-largest city, Kharkiv. Ukraine's military said retreating Russian forces destroyed three bridges on a road northeast of the city to try to slow the Ukrainian advance.

The largest European conflict since World War II has developed into a punishing war of attrition that has killed thousands of people, forced millions to flee their homes and destroyed large swaths of some cities.

Ukrainian leaders warned that attacks would only worsen in the lead-up to Victory Day, when Russia celebrates Nazi Germany's defeat in 1945 with military parades. Russian President Vladimir Putin is believed to want to proclaim some kind of triumph in Ukraine when he addresses the troops on Red Square on Monday.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his people "embody the spirit of those who prevailed during the Second World War." He accused Putin of trying "to twist history to attempt to justify his unprovoked and brutal war against Ukraine."

"As war again rages in Europe, we must increase our resolve to resist those who now seek to manipulate historical memory in order to advance their own ambitions," Blinken said in a statement as the United States and United Kingdom commemorate the Allied victory in Europe.

The most intense fighting in recent days has been in eastern Ukraine, where the two sides are entrenched in a fierce battle to capture or reclaim territory. Moscow's offensive there has focused on the Donbas, where Russia-backed separatists have been fighting since 2014.

The governor of the Luhansk region, one of two that make up the Donbas, said a Russian strike destroyed a school in the village of Bilogorivka where 90 people were seeking safety in the basement. Gov. Serhiy Haidai, who posted pictures of the burning rubble on Telegram, said 30 people were rescued. The emergency services later reported that two bodies had been found and more could still be buried under the rubble. Rescue work was suspended overnight but was to resume on Sunday.

Haidai also said two boys aged 11 and 14 were killed by Russian shelling in the town of Pryvillia, while two girls aged 8 and 12 and a 69-year-old woman were wounded.

Moscow also has sought to sweep across southern Ukraine both to cut off the country from the sea and create a corridor to the breakaway Moldovan region of Transnistria, long home to Russian troops. But it has struggled to achieve those objectives.

On Saturday, six Russian cruise missiles fired from aircraft hit Odesa, where a curfew is in place until Tuesday morning. Videos posted on social media showed thick black smoke rising over the Black Sea port city as sirens wailed.

The Odesa city council said four of the missiles hit a furniture company, with the shock waves and debris badly damaging high-rise apartment buildings. The other two missiles hit the Odesa airport, where the runway had already been taken out in a previous Russian attack.

Air raid sirens sounded several times early Sunday, the city council said.

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press showed Ukraine targeting Russian-held Snake Island in a bid to impede Russia's efforts to control the Black Sea. An image taken early Saturday by Planet Labs PBC showed that most of the island's buildings had been destroyed by Ukrainian drone attacks, as well as what appeared to be a Serna-class landing craft against the island's northern beach.

The image corresponds with a Ukrainian military video showing a drone striking the Russian vessel, engulfing it in flames. Snake Island, located some 35 kilometers (20 miles) off the coast, figured in a memorable incident early in the war when Ukrainian border guards stationed there defied Russian orders to surrender, purportedly using colorful language.

In Mariupol, Ukrainian fighters made a final stand against a complete Russian takeover of the strategically important city, which would give Moscow a land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, annexed from Ukraine during a 2014 invasion.

Satellite photos shot Friday by Planet Labs PBC showed vast devastation at the sprawling Azovstal seaside steel mill, the last pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the city. Buildings had gaping holes in the roofs, including one under which hundreds of fighters were likely hiding.

After rescuers evacuated the last civilians Saturday, Zelenskyy said in his nightly address that the focus would turn to extracting the wounded and medics: “Of course, if everyone fulfills the agreements. Of course, if there are no lies.”

He added that work would also continue Sunday on securing humanitarian corridors for residents of Mariupol and surrounding towns to leave.

The situation at the plant has drawn the world’s attention, with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross desperately trying to organize evacuations.

In recent days, fighters inside described bringing out small groups of civilians who had been hiding there for weeks. The fighters said via social media that both they and the Russians had used a white flag system to halt fighting in order to get civilians out.

But Russian forces have intensified fire on the mill with mortars, artillery, truck-mounted rocket systems, aerial bombardment and shelling from the sea, making evacuation operations difficult.

Three Ukrainian fighters were reportedly killed and six more wounded during an evacuation attempt Friday. Capt. Sviatoslav Palamar, the deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, said his troops had waved white flags, and he accused Russian forces of firing an anti-tank weapon at a vehicle.

It remains unclear what will happen to the estimated 2,000 fighters at Azovstal, both those still in combat and the hundreds believed to be wounded. In recent days the Ukrainian government has been reaching out to international organizations to try to secure safe passage for them. The fighters have repeatedly vowed not to surrender.

Zelenskyy said officials were trying to find a way to evacuate them. He acknowledged the difficulty, but said: “We are not losing hope, we are not stopping. Every day we are looking for some diplomatic option that might work.”

Russian forces have probed the plant and even reached into its warren of tunnels, according to Ukrainian officials.

Kharkiv, which was the first Soviet capital in Ukraine and had a prewar population of about 4 million, remained a key target of Russian shelling in the northeast. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Saturday that the Russian military also hit large shipments of weapons from the U.S. and other Western countries with Iskander missiles in the region. His claims couldn’t be independently verified.

But Western military analysts said Ukrainian forces were making progress in securing positions around the city. The Ukrainian military said it retook control of five villages and part of a sixth.

A Washington-based think tank, the Institute for the Study of War, said Ukraine may be able to push Russian forces out of artillery range of Kharkiv in the coming days, providing a respite for the city and an opportunity to build the defenders’ momentum “into a successful, broader counteroffensive.”

	<p>Zelenskyy expressed outrage at Russian missile attacks that destroyed a museum in the Kharkiv region and hit Odesa, “where almost every street has something memorable, something historical.” He said Russian forces have destroyed or damaged about 200 cultural heritage sites.</p> <p>“Every day of this war, the Russian army does something that leaves you speechless,” he said. “But then the next day it does something that makes you feel this way in a new way.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Russians retreat from Kharkiv
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-retreats-kharkiv/2022/05/08/id/1068899/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian defenders successfully pushed their Russian invaders back toward the northeast border and away from the city of Kharkiv, with the Russians blowing up bridges behind them as they retreated.</p> <p>With less than 48 hours before President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia aimed to lead his country in Victory Day celebrations commemorating the Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany, the Russian retreat from the area around Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, contradicted the Russian narrative and illustrated the complicated picture along the 300-mile front in eastern Ukraine, The New York Times reported.</p> <p>As many as 60 people were feared to have been killed in the Russian bombing of a village school in the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk, the regional governor said on Sunday.</p> <p>Governor Serhiy Gaidai said Russian forces dropped a bomb on Saturday afternoon on the school in Bilohorivka where about 90 people were sheltering, causing a fire that engulfed the building.</p> <p>"The fire was extinguished after nearly four hours, then the rubble was cleared, and, unfortunately, the bodies of two people were found," Gaidai wrote on the Telegram messaging app.</p> <p>"Thirty people were evacuated from the rubble, seven of whom were injured. Sixty people were likely to have died under the rubble of buildings."</p> <p>Reuters could not immediately verify the report.</p> <p>Ukraine and its Western allies have accused Russian forces of targeting civilians in the war, which Moscow denies.</p> <p>In the ruined southeastern port city of Mariupol, scores of civilians have been evacuated from a sprawling steel plant in a week-long operation brokered by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an address late on Saturday that more than 300 civilians had been rescued from the Azovstal steelworks and authorities would now focus on trying to evacuate the wounded and medics. Other Ukrainian sources have cited different figures.</p> <p>Russian-backed separatists on Saturday reported a total of 176 civilians evacuated from the plant.</p> <p>The Azovstal plant is a last hold-out for Ukrainian forces in the city now largely controlled by Russia, and many civilians had also taken refuges in its underground shelters. It has become a symbol of resistance to the Russian effort to capture swathes of eastern and southern Ukraine.</p> <p>Putin calls the invasion he launched on Feb. 24 a "special military operation" to disarm Ukraine and rid it of anti-Russian nationalism fomented by the West. Ukraine and its allies say Russia launched an unprovoked war.</p>

Mariupol is key to blocking Ukrainian exports and linking the Crimean Peninsula, seized by Russia in 2014, and parts of the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk that have been controlled by Russia-backed separatists since that same year.

VICTORY DAY

In an emotional address on Sunday for Victory Day, when Europe commemorates the formal surrender of Germany to the Allies in World War Two, Zelenskyy said that evil had returned to Ukraine with the Russian invasion, but his country would prevail.

President Joe Biden and other G7 leaders were to hold a video call with Zelenskyy on Sunday in a show of unity ahead of Victory Day celebrations on Monday in Russia.

Underlining Western support for Ukraine, Britain pledged to provide a further 1.3 billion pounds (\$1.6 billion) in military support and aid, double its previous spending commitments.

Victory Day is a major event in Russia and Putin will preside on Monday over a parade in Moscow's Red Square of troops, tanks, rockets and intercontinental ballistic missiles, showing military might even as his forces fight on in Ukraine.

His speech could offer clues on the future of the war. Russia's efforts have been stymied by logistical and equipment problems and high casualties in the face of fierce resistance.

U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns said on Saturday that Putin was convinced "doubling down" on the conflict would improve the outcome for Russia.

"He's in a frame of mind in which he doesn't believe he can afford to lose," Burns told a Financial Times event in Washington on Saturday.

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HEADLINE	05/06 California steady climb Covid infections
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/california-covid-numbers-hit-highest-point-since-february-bay-area-sees-worst-rates/ar-AAX00Cs?ocid=uxbndlbing
GIST	<p>ACRAMENTO, Calif. — Coronavirus infections have continued a steady climb in California since early April, and while the curve of new cases remains less steep than winter's omicron variant surge, the rising spread of two contagious subvariants is still prompting concern about a fresh wave of virus cases.</p> <p>The California Department of Public Health on Friday reported the statewide daily case rate for COVID-19 at 14 per 100,000 residents, a 27% increase in the past week and up 71% in the past two weeks.</p> <p>Test positivity has spiked from 2.8% to 3.9% in the past week for California's highest reading since Feb. 18, when the state remained on the downslope of the omicron surge.</p> <p>California's case rate dipped as low as 5.2 per 100,000, and positivity as low as 1.2%, in mid-March.</p> <p>Hospitals statewide were treating 1,112 patients with confirmed COVID-19 Thursday, after bottoming out at 950 on April 25, for a 17% jump in the past 10 days. Virus patients in intensive care units during the same window spiked 50%, from 112 to 168, CDPH reported Friday.</p> <p>Some of the state's highest transmission rates are now being recorded in the San Francisco Bay Area. San Francisco now has the highest daily case rate at 32 per 100,000, a 66% increase compared to two weeks earlier.</p> <p>The next four counties by case rate in Friday's update were San Mateo at 28 per 100,000, Santa Cruz at 28 per 100,000, Santa Clara at 25 per 100,000 and Alameda at 22 per 100,000.</p>

San Francisco also has the state's fourth-highest positivity rate at 8.6%, behind only Imperial County at 10.3% and the state's two least populous counties, Alpine and Sierra, both at 14.3%. Marin and Sonoma counties each recorded 7.8% positivity, double the state average.

More concerning, the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in San Francisco has more than doubled in the past 10 days from 26 to 55, according to state health figures updated Friday. San Francisco's ICU total shot from three to 10.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in an update this week to its three-tiered, nationwide map of "community levels" for COVID-19, showed Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties in the "medium" level of coronavirus activity. California's remaining 53 counties are in the "low" level.

Virus metrics vary across counties in the Sacramento region, currently better than most Bay Area counties but slightly worse than the state average.

High schools in both the Sacramento area and Bay Area are reporting [outbreaks or clusters of COVID-19 cases, some of them coming a couple of weeks after many schools held prom](#) or similar dance events and a few weeks after spring break.

"We are seeing an uptick in cases in general and we have seen an uptick in cases and outbreaks being reported by schools in recent weeks," Sacramento County health office spokeswoman Samantha Mott said in an emailed statement Thursday.

A [pair of highly transmissible omicron subvariants, known as BA.2 and BA.2.12.1](#), now make up a vast majority of U.S. cases, with the prevalence of the latter creeping upward. The two variants are likely responsible in large part for California's rising transmission rates.

BA.2.12.1, the more contagious of the two, made up an estimated 37% of cases nationwide for the week of April 24 to April 30, according to a weekly update Tuesday from the CDC, up from 27% the prior week. BA.2 decreased from 70% to 62%, suggesting BA.2.12.1 may soon overtake it.

For the CDC region that includes California, Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii and Pacific territories, BA.2.12.1 increased from 12% to 18% in the past week, while BA.2 dropped from 85% to 81%.

Health officials have estimated BA.2 is about 40% more transmissible than the original omicron variant, BA.1; and BA.2.12.1 is believed to be about 25% more contagious than BA.2.

Yolo County health officials last week, in a joint news release with [the Healthy Davis Together testing initiative](#), said BA.2.12.1 "now accounts for nearly half of campus cases" at the University of California, Davis after being first detected there in late March.

"Data show that COVID-19 is spreading in Yolo County, especially in Davis. Yolo residents are encouraged to take additional precautions to guard against infection," Yolo County health officer Dr. Aimee Sisson said in a prepared statement.

"I strongly recommend masking indoors with a high-quality mask and getting tested if you have symptoms, have a known exposure, or recently participated in a large gathering like Picnic Day," which was held April 23, Sisson said. "If you are eligible for a booster, now is a good time to get that booster — do not wait."

It is still not fully clear how much immune protection Californians may maintain from the immense wave of infections during the omicron surge, which pushed the case rate above 300 per 100,000 and positivity above 22% in early January, as experts study the new subvariants' ability to evade prior immunity.

HEADLINE	05/07 CIA: China study Ukraine war, eyes Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.barrons.com/news/china-carefully-studying-ukraine-war-as-it-eyes-taiwan-cia-chief-01651943108
GIST	<p>China is closely studying Russian's invasion of Ukraine and is likely adjusting its long-term plans for gaining control of Taiwan based on the lessons from the war, CIA director Bill Burns said Saturday.</p> <p>"Clearly the Chinese leadership is trying to look carefully at what lessons they should draw from Ukraine about their own ambitions and Taiwan," Burns told a Financial Times conference.</p> <p>Burns said he thinks Beijing has been "surprised" by the poor performance of Russian military forces as well as the tough resistance coming from the entire Ukrainian society.</p> <p>"I think they've been struck by the way in which particularly the transatlantic alliance has come together to impose economic costs on Russia as a result of that aggression," he continued.</p> <p>Beijing has been "unsettled by the fact that what Putin has done is to drive Europeans and Americans closer together," Burns said.</p> <p>"What conclusions get drawn from all that remains a question mark," he said.</p> <p>"I think the Chinese leadership is looking very carefully at all this, at the costs and consequences of any effort to use force to gain control over Taiwan."</p> <p>Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by Beijing, which sees the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory to be retaken one day, by force if necessary.</p> <p>China has ramped up pressure on Taiwan since Tsai Ing-wen was elected president in 2016, as she considers the island a sovereign nation and not part of Chinese territory.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Ukrainians reject Russia Victory Day
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-08-22/h_8a2d77a9c6671dd79b09d9ec790326b6
GIST	<p>Ukrainians once celebrated Victory Day on May 9, in the Russian tradition. But now, as they piece through the rubble of their homes and mourn lost friends and relatives, many pointedly mark the occasion a day earlier.</p> <p>"This house, I have lived here for 40 years. Both my kids were born here," Olga Teterska, a 48-year-old accountant from Borodianka, near Kyiv, told CNN as she looked at her destroyed home. "It is impossible to describe with words how I feel being back here and seeing what has happened."</p> <p>"The flower garden is still growing," she added. "We'll save the ones we can."</p> <p>"We celebrated May 9 until 2014," Teterska said. "Now I will only observe May 8 as a day to remember the soldiers who fought and also as a way to be closer to Europe."</p> <p>The surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945 marked the end of the largest land war in Europe until this February, when Russian forces launched an all-out assault on Ukraine.</p> <p>But the timing of that surrender — late in the evening in Germany, and after midnight in Russia — symbolically split Europe in two, creating separate commemoration days on the continent.</p> <p>Most of Europe marks VE Day (Victory in Europe Day) on May 8. But in Russia and a clutch of ex-Soviet states, the anniversary falls on the 9th. In Moscow, it is celebrated with an extravagant military parade and a speech by President Vladimir Putin.</p>

"Now May 8 is more important," Valentina Torghunshko, from Borodianka, told CNN. "May 9 for me is Russia's day now. It used to be Victory Day but everything has changed now. The Russians want us on our knees."

"When the building was shelled, I was in the bunker," the 68-year-old added, describing the day Russian forces struck her home. "Everything I had is destroyed. I was able to save my cat after. She was without food or water but she is alive."

This year, there are fears the Russian leader will use his Victory Day parade speech to formally declare war on Ukraine. Until now, the Kremlin has euphemistically referred to their invasion as a "special military operation."

That could bring yet more destruction for many in Ukraine's east, and around the country. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko has urged citizens to stay inside from Sunday into Monday, and Western officials have warned the Russian invasion may be ramped up.

Vladim Bozhko, a farmer from the village of Andriivka, said his house was occupied by Russians, then destroyed in shelling as he and his wife hid in the cellar.

His son was fighting in Ukraine's military and was killed in April near Hostomel, he told CNN.

"I feel nothing now," he said, reflecting on the significance of May 9.

"It used to be about celebrating the victory of our grandparents. This year there is nothing to celebrate."

"I will always remember what my grandparents did in World War II," he added. "But with what the Russians have done to my son, to my house, I will not celebrate Victory Day."

"To the Russians: Don't bring your sons here," he warned. "We have nothing left to lose anymore. We will fight you."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Metals scramble; Africa mining in spotlight
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/global-scramble-metals-thrusts-africa-into-mining-spotlight-2022-05-08/
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG, May 8 (Reuters) - The need to secure new sources of metals for the energy transition amid sanctions on top producer Russia has increased the Africa risk appetite for major miners, who have few alternatives to the resource-rich continent.</p> <p>Companies and investors are considering projects they may have previously overlooked, while governments are also looking to Africa, anxious to ensure their countries can procure enough metals to feed an accelerating net-zero push.</p> <p>This year's Investing in African Mining Indaba conference, which runs May 9-12 in Cape Town, will see the highest-ranking U.S. government official in years attending, organisers say, as well as representatives from the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals Corporation (JOGMEC), in a sign of rich countries' rising concern about securing supply.</p> <p>"The reality is that the resources the world wants are typically located in difficult places," said Steven Fox, executive chairman of New York-based political risk consultancy Veracity Worldwide.</p> <p>The U.S. administration wants to position itself as a strong supporter of battery metals projects in sub-Saharan Africa, he said.</p>

"While Africa presents its challenges, those challenges are no more difficult than the corresponding set of challenges in Canada. It may be easier to actually bring a project to fruition in Africa, than in a place like Canada or the U.S.," he added.

The United States has voiced support for new domestic mines, but projects have stalled. Rio Tinto's (RIO.AX) Resolution copper project, for example, was halted over Native American claims on the land, and conservation issues.

Certainly, the risks of mining in sub-Saharan Africa remain high. The acute security challenge facing mines in the gold-rich Sahel region was highlighted last month when Russia's Nordgold abandoned its Taparko gold mine in Burkina Faso over an increasing threat from militants.

And even in the continent's most industrialised economy, South Africa, deteriorating rail infrastructure is forcing some coal producers to resort to trucking their product to ports.

Yet with Russia's 7% of global nickel supply, 10% of the world's platinum, and 25-30% of the world's palladium off the table, Africa's rich deposits of those metals start looking a lot more attractive.

"As a mining company, there aren't many opportunities and if you are going to grow, you're going to have to look at riskier countries," said George Cheveley, portfolio manager at Ninety One.

"Clearly, after Russia-Ukraine people are more sensitive to geopolitical risk and you cannot predict which projects are going to work out and which are not," he added.

Kabanga Nickel, a project in Tanzania, secured funding from global miner BHP (BHP.AX) in January, and CEO Chris Showalter said it is seeing increased demand from potential offtakers.

Western sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine are forcing metals supply chains to reconfigure along geopolitical lines, Showalter said.

"Not everyone's going to be able to get clean battery metals from a friendly jurisdiction, so I think some difficult decisions will have to be made, and it is going to force people to make some new decisions about where they want to source."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Shanghai tightens Covid lockdown
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/beijing-covid-outbreak-proves-stubborn-mass-tests-becoming-routine-2022-05-08/
GIST	<p>SHANGHAI/BEIJING, May 8 (Reuters) - Shanghai authorities were tightening the city-wide COVID lockdown they imposed more than a month ago, prolonging into late May an ordeal that China's capital Beijing was desperate to avoid by turning mass testing into an almost daily routine.</p> <p>The commercial hub of 25 million was making a fresh push to bring case numbers outside the areas that were facing the strictest curbs to zero by the second half of May, people familiar with the matter told Reuters.</p> <p>The people said movement curbs will generally remain through the month due to fears of a rebound even though case numbers have been falling. Authorities in some districts issued notices ordering people back into their residential compounds after having let them out for brief walks or quick shopping.</p> <p>In a video shared widely on Chinese social media, police in hazmat suits argue with residents who were told they needed to be quarantined after a neighbour tested positive.</p> <p>"This is so that we can thoroughly remove any positive cases," one of the officers is heard saying. "Stop asking me why, there is no why. We have to adhere to national guidelines."</p>

Reuters was not able to independently verify the video.

The Shanghai government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The prolonged isolation and fear of being sent to quarantine centres, which sometimes lack showers and other basic conditions, have caused widespread frustration, even altercations.

Videos posted online last week showed dozens of workers at Apple and Tesla supplier Quanta overwhelming hazmat-suited security guards and vaulting over factory gates to escape being trapped inside amid COVID rumours.

Strict COVID restrictions in Beijing, Shanghai and dozens of other major cities across China are taking a psychological toll on its people, weighing on the world's second-largest economy and disrupting global supply chains and international trade.

The measures mark a sharp contrast with most of the world, which is easing or removing COVID curbs to live with the virus even as infections spread.

Beijing has closed gyms and entertainment venues, banned dine-in services at restaurants and shut scores of bus routes and almost 15% of its sprawling subway system, while many residents voluntarily avoid going out.

"It is quite strange," said a 50-year-old Beijing resident surnamed Ding, as he took a photo of an empty street leading into a closed subway station. "It is the first time in all my years in Beijing that I see empty streets in the middle of summer. It's magical."

Businesses that remained open were not seeing many clients as people did not want to do anything that might bring them near infected people and force them into quarantine.

"North of us are malls and offices that have been sealed, and their apps might mark them as close contacts if they came," said a barber surnamed Song, referring to the mobile monitoring software all residents must use.

"This outbreak has truly unsettled everyone."

Premier Li Keqiang in a teleconference with other top officials pledged on Saturday to support "as many employers as possible," especially among small and midsize firms, to keep people in their jobs, state media reported.

China's jobless rate stood at 5.8% in March, the highest since May 2020, while that in 31 major cities hit a record 6.0%. April's full lockdown of Shanghai and stricter curbs elsewhere have since further pummelled the job market.

Despite the costs, Chinese authorities are unwavering in their commitment to stamp out the coronavirus. Last week the authorities threatened action against critics of the zero-COVID policy.

Regular testing is set to become a feature of daily life in many cities, as officials hope that could help detect and isolate infections early enough to avoid mass closures and movement curbs.

On Sunday, residents lined up for another round of tests in Beijing's Chaoyang, Fangshan and Fengtai districts and small parts of others. In a large Chaoyang compound, two people moved around with loud speakers blaring a repeated message reminding residents to be tested.

Many residents, even if not subject to the mass tests, still must show a recent negative result to get to work or enter various venues.

	<p>Shanghai, which has conducted 63 million PCR tests and 126 million rapid antigen tests last week, will also keep conducting daily screening, city officials said.</p> <p>Shanghai and other cities are also building thousands of permanent PCR testing stations. read more</p> <p>Beijing's daily COVID cases are in the dozens, much lower than Shanghai's at this point in its outbreak, when infections were in the triple digits and rising.</p> <p>Shanghai's cases fell for a ninth day, Sunday data showed, but remained in the thousands, prompting warnings against complacency from party and city officials.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 UK pledges more aid to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-biden-boris-johnson-technology-db603318cb799f38dce144d29672800a
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — Britain will provide an extra 1.3 billion pounds (\$1.6 billion) in military support to Ukraine to help the country defend against Russian forces, officials said Sunday.</p> <p>British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, U.S. President Joe Biden and leaders from other Group of Seven countries are expected to hold online talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later Sunday to discuss the further support.</p> <p>The meeting is partly meant to display unity among Western allies on Victory in Europe Day, which marks Nazi Germany's surrender in 1945.</p> <p>The funding, which comes from British government reserves, includes 300 million pounds of military kit promised by Prime Minister Boris Johnson earlier this week, such as radar systems to target Russian artillery, GPS jamming equipment and night vision devices.</p> <p>Britain's government said it is the highest rate of U.K. military spending on a conflict since Iraq and Afghanistan.</p> <p>Officials said Johnson will meet with British arms companies later this month to discuss increasing production in response to the demand created by the conflict in Ukraine.</p> <p>Johnson said Britain's aid to Ukraine will also help boost the U.K. defense economy.</p> <p>Britain has already committed to about 1.5 billion pounds for Ukraine, including humanitarian aid and loan guarantees.</p> <p>Also Sunday, German Bundestag President Bärbel Bas arrived in Kyiv, where she was expected to meet with Zelenskyy and attend a memorial event honoring the anniversary of the end of World War II.</p> <p>Bas, as the second highest-ranking German government official after the president, is the most senior German politician to visit Ukraine so far. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock is also expected to visit in the coming days, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said last week.</p> <p>Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal posted a photo of himself shaking hands with Bas on Twitter. He wrote that Ukraine is counting on Germany's support to recover Ukraine and join the European Union.</p> <p>Croatia's prime minister was also in Ukraine Sunday following reports that a Croatian citizen fighting in Mariupol was captured by Russian forces.</p>

	The Croatian government said in a statement that the visit by Andrej Plenkovic presented “an expression of solidarity and support” with the Ukrainian leadership and the people.
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HEADLINE	05/07 Definition of victory remains murky
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/07/ukraine-russia-war-victory-loss/
GIST	<p>As the war in Ukraine grinds through its third month, the Biden administration has tried to maintain a set of public objectives that adapt to changes on the battlefield and stress NATO unity, while making it clear that Russia will lose, even as Ukraine decides what constitutes winning.</p> <p>But the contours of a Russian loss remain as murky as a Ukrainian victory. And as the conflict heads into what is likely to be a protracted fight, the need to manage allied cooperation unity and public opinion here and abroad — balancing the probable with the possible — has become as much a priority as what is happening on the battlefield.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who said late last month that Ukraine “can win” the war against Russia, and the Biden administration would do “everything we can” to support that goal, sounded less bullish in congressional testimony this week.</p> <p>“We hope that, at the end of this, that Ukraine will be a ... sovereign state with a functioning government that can protect its territory,” Austin told the Senate Appropriations Committee. Austin and other senior officials, however, have declined to specify their idea of what that government will look like, and what territory it will include.</p> <p>Whatever outcome it would eventually like to see, the administration has quickly walked back statements that went beyond the bounds of an end to the war with a sovereign Ukraine still in existence. When President Biden said in late March that Russian President Vladimir Putin “cannot remain in power,” he and the White House rushed to explain it as a presidential expression of “moral outrage” rather than a policy of regime change in Moscow.</p> <p>When Austin drew attention last month by saying the United States sought a “weakened” Russia, administration officials quickly added that the goal was specific to military conflict, and was to ensure Putin would think twice about invading another country.</p> <p>Ukrainians themselves have been clear about their definition of winning. Their goal, President Volodymyr Zelensky has said repeatedly, is restoration of full territorial integrity, pushing the Russians back from recently claimed territory in the south and east, as well as ultimately from Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014, and parts of the eastern Donbas region that was grabbed by Russia-backed Ukrainian separatists at the same time.</p> <p>“I was elected as president of Ukraine. Not as president of mini-Ukraine,” Zelensky said in remarks to the Chatham House think tank in London on Friday, “What matters is Ukraine’s victory,” he said, “and by Ukraine’s victory I mean something that belongs to us.”</p> <p>Serious negotiations with Russia would only begin when Moscow pulls its troops back, or they are pushed from territory occupied since the invasion began Feb. 24. He also listed the return of refugees, Ukraine’s admission to the European Union, and the prosecution of Russian military leaders for war crimes as elements of any postwar landscape.</p> <p>“I think we shouldn’t underestimate the view of the Ukrainian people, which is never to accept anything” a European diplomat said. Even if direct Russia-Ukraine negotiations, now in abeyance, resume, “there is no way politically Zelensky can settle with the Russians” unless it includes the broad elements the Ukrainian president has articulated. The diplomat was one of several U.S. and foreign officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal calculations.</p>

Within NATO, some have outlined more definitive goals than others. In a rousing video speech on Tuesday to the Ukrainian parliament, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson moved beyond Austin's possibility of victory, assuring that "Ukraine will win."

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has been even more specific. Britain was "doubling down" on its aid to Ukraine, she said last week at the Mansion House, an annual London venue for delivery of a major foreign policy address. Calling Russian forces a "cancerous growth," she said "we will keep going further and faster to push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine," including Crimea and Donbas.

Ukraine's combat success so far has surprised and heartened the administration. Before the war began, the administration released an unprecedented amount of classified information indicating that amassed Russian forces would invade. But it did not reveal the expectation of the U.S. intelligence community that Ukraine would fall in short order — with Kyiv succumbing within three to four days — according to a person familiar with the matter.

NATO unity and a rapid response, with U.S. and allies rushing troops to NATO's eastern border and weapons to Ukraine, were gratifying, even more so when Ukrainian forces not only held Kyiv but drove the Russians out of the north.

The current phase of the fight is likely to be much harder and more protracted. Russia, in apparent retreat from its initial objective of taking most, if not all, of Ukrainian territory, has massed its forces in the eastern part of the country along a line parallel to its own border. There, its existing control of significant territory will likely temper the logistical problems it suffered around Kyiv. In the southeast, Russian forces are crushing remaining opposition along swaths of the Black Sea coast.

Miles to the west of the Russian lines, tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops — up to half of its 126,000 prewar army — face them. The U.S. military assesses that Russia's tactical objective is to send more of its own forces in behind the Ukrainians from the south and from the northeast border area and encircle them. Across the flat, farming territory, a massive ground battle of attrition is expected to ensue, fought with long-range artillery and airstrikes, and armored vehicles.

In response, the United States and its allies are rushing heavy artillery, air defense and surveillance equipment, armed drones, and armored vehicles to the Ukrainians. Biden has asked Congress for an emergency \$33 billion in weaponry and other support, in addition to the massive amounts already sent.

"Russia's changing objectives would certainly indicate that all this effort is having a strong effect," a senior administration official said. "But as we have laid out many times, this conflict will likely be long and hard, and the next few months are critical, so Congress needs to move quickly."

U.S. and allied staying power will be crucial. One of the sustaining challenges, beyond the focus on the "now" of what Ukraine needs, is maintaining public unity and support among and inside the countries backing Ukraine, another U.S. official said.

"Public support is a key variable in the outcome on the battlefield" and "we have to continue to make a compelling case," this official said. "Failure or stalemate equal discouragement," while success on the ground "equals unity."

As the war continues, especially if it drags into next winter, some European governments may face shortages of heating fuel in addition to gas and consumer goods. For Biden, facing his own economic difficulties, the perception of Russia as having lost, or at least losing, could make a difference during midterm elections in November — as could the perception that his administration "lost" Ukraine.

Some are more optimistic about Ukraine's chances for continued, or even early, progress in the current phase of the war. Retired Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, a former supreme allied commander of NATO, said it is too early to celebrate, but there are "good signs" that the Russians may not be able to accomplish

everything they want in the east. Some “very smart people,” he said, believe that Russia will “culminate” its next operation within two to four weeks, effectively running out of military capability to press on.

That would open the door to a larger Ukrainian offensive to take back land that Russia has seized.

“Then we have the confirmation about what winning looks like,” Breedlove said. “Other people in the world are starting to set expectations that maybe winning is actually retaking all of Donbas and eventually expelling Russia from Crimea,” he said. “I don’t know if that’s realistic right now or not, but it’s certainly out there.”

The Pentagon is reluctant to publicly rate Ukraine’s chances of regaining all of its territory.

“We are careful in the way we talk about progress in the war, especially when it comes to Ukrainian capabilities and efforts,” a senior U.S. defense official said. “We have an obligation to speak to what we are providing them, but we never want to provide so much information that we violate their operational security or make it harder for them to conduct their operations. It’s a balance we strive to maintain every day.”

As to the administration’s definition of winning, “I think the ambiguity is not accidental,” the European diplomat said. “Sometimes if you’re very specific about your aims, it makes it easier to stop those aims. ... I always find myself wanting to defend the Americans on this, because if I were the Americans, I’d be more careful, too, because they’re the superpower, they’re the ones the Russians care most about.”

When asked Wednesday about whether the United States would be satisfied if Ukraine agreed to Russia remaining in Crimea and parts of the east, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki repeated what has become an administration mantra: “The Ukrainians are going to define what a successful outcome looks like for them.”

Besides, Psaki said, Russia has already lost by not having achieved its initial goals of taking over much, if not all, of Ukraine or dividing NATO.

Another U.S. official put it a different way. “A lot of people have read too much into Austin’s comments” this official said, noting that the United States has from the start sought “a strategic defeat for Russia — meaning that Russia wouldn’t be able to project power like this again ... to threaten Ukraine or other neighbors again.”

At the end of the day, this official said, “accountability can come in many forms. It’s up to Ukraine to decide the contours of any peace agreement, but we also have tools that we put in place in terms of sanctions, export controls that can be removed or not, depending on how things look at the end of this.”

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HEADLINE	05/08 Beijing’s man in Hong Kong takes over
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/asia/hong-kong-john-lee.html
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — John Lee “will make Hong Kongers and international investors feel relaxed, at ease and full of confidence,” a pro-Beijing newspaper declared. He will help the city “start anew to achieve greater glories,” the state-run China Daily wrote, in one of a series of articles praising him.</p> <p>His rise to the top leadership position is “a concentrated embodiment of public opinion,” said China’s official arm in Hong Kong, though only 1,424 members of a government-vetted committee voted for him on Sunday, in an uncontested race controlled by Beijing.</p> <p>Having officially become the next chief executive, Mr. Lee is now Beijing’s man, a security-minded official who can be relied on to follow orders and keep Hong Kong in line.</p>

His political agenda is the next chapter in China's vision for the former British colony, set in motion by the [sweeping national security law imposed two years ago](#), which quashed dissent in a city once known for its vibrant civil society and freewheeling press.

Mr. Lee, a top architect of the crackdown on [the antigovernment protests that roiled Hong Kong](#) in 2019, inherits a city that has been tamed and cowed, with Beijing's most outspoken critics behind bars or in exile. Unlike his predecessor, he will encounter little resistance to a legislative slate that prioritizes social stability and bureaucratic loyalty, the ideals of China's ruling Communist Party.

But he will also face a city embattled by the coronavirus and some of the world's toughest pandemic restrictions. The economy is shrinking, unemployment is rising and growing numbers of people are leaving the city, imperiling Hong Kong's status as a global financial center.

Mr. Lee waved and bowed to applauding voters on Sunday after being declared the winner. "Having restored order from chaos, it is high time that Hong Kong starts a new chapter of development, a chapter that will be geared toward greater prosperity for all," he said.

Since Hong Kong was reclaimed by China in 1997, Beijing has always let it be known who it wants in the top job, though it did so more subtly in the past.

Jiang Zemin, China's then-leader, gave his tacit support to Tung Chee-hwa, the first chief executive, by singling him out for a long handshake at a 1996 meeting in Beijing. In 2012, the Central Liaison Office, which officially represents the Chinese government in Hong Kong, [quietly told electors to pick Leung Chun-ying](#), the eventual winner.

When Mr. Lee announced his intention to run, he noted that he first needed Beijing's permission to step down as chief secretary, the city's No. 2 job. It was a simple matter of procedure, but also a public declaration of who was calling the shots.

Mr. Lee's ascension was all but assured a month ago when his predecessor, Carrie Lam, said she would not seek a second term and Beijing approved his candidacy. Nobody else garnered enough nominations to make the ballot.

The process has always been tightly controlled, but China removed any veneer of competition or opposition this time. Between new electoral rules and the national security law, the pro-democracy camp was effectively neutered.

As chief secretary, Mr. Lee led a panel that vetted the election committee members for loyalty last year. On Sunday, 1,416 members of them voted for Mr. Lee, with just eight opposed. He will be sworn in on July 1, the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China.

"Beijing has completely stacked the election committee with its loyalists and further twisted the process into a meaningless competition," said Larry Diamond, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. "Even in Iran, there is more of a contest for the head of government."

Mr. Lee's pedigree reinforces Beijing's intentions in Hong Kong. After joining the police as a probationary inspector at 19, he rose through the ranks, eventually becoming the security secretary in 2017.

Mr. Lee will be the first former police officer to assume Hong Kong's top job in more than a century, and security remains a priority for him.

He plans to push through a package of new laws on treason, secession, sedition and subversion, known collectively as Article 23. The laws are required by Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, but its

leaders have never managed to pass them. The government tried in 2003, only to retreat after hundreds of thousands of people protested.

This time, Mr. Lee won't face similar opposition.

News outlets, unions, political parties and human rights groups have closed under government pressure and national security investigations. Dozens of pro-democracy politicians and activists are in custody awaiting trial on national security charges.

"In order to deal with future national security risks, it is urgent to complete the legislation of Article 23, and the legislation must be a 'tiger with teeth,'" the state-owned Ta Kung Pao newspaper said last month.

Mr. Lee has been a staunch advocate of security legislation. He told the United Nations Human Rights Council in March that the 2020 security law had "restored peace and stability" by ending the "violence, destruction and chaos" of the protests.

He also wants to root out critics in Hong Kong's civil service, which has been under attack from pro-Beijing politicians since some government employees joined the 2019 demonstrations. Beijing loyalists have also accused the bureaucracy of resisting efforts to carry out mainland-style coronavirus controls, including lockdowns and mandatory testing.

As chief secretary, Mr. Lee expanded a requirement for public office holders to take fealty pledges similar to those required for bureaucrats on the mainland. And he headed a committee to vet candidates for elected office, to ensure that they were sufficiently loyal (the same panel that vetted his future voters).

"We need to make sure the civil service will faithfully implement the policies of the government," said Lau Siu-kai, an adviser to Beijing on Hong Kong policy.

Mr. Lee has also embraced the idea, popular among mainland Chinese officials, that a lack of housing and economic opportunities helped ignite the protests of 2019.

Last month, he toured a crowded Hong Kong housing block. Pledging to create more public housing, he described the bleak conditions there, mentioning a mother and two children who lived in a 150-square-foot apartment "with cockroaches that sometimes climb in through the water pipes."

"Their greatest wish is to be allocated public housing as soon as possible to improve their living environment," he said. The waiting time for public housing is the longest it has been in [two decades](#).

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the challenges Mr. Lee will soon face in one of the world's most expensive and unequal cities.

[Life came to a standstill](#) this year as the Omicron variant infected more than a million residents and engulfed hospitals. Officials turned to the "[zero Covid](#)" strategy, shutting down bars, gyms and schools and reducing restaurant hours. The city's working class has been hit hard by such measures, which have left the service industry reeling.

The coronavirus policies, which have largely isolated Hong Kong, have also prompted a reassessment of the city by international companies. Business leaders say they are struggling to hire and keep executives in Hong Kong. A growing number of companies have relocated, while others have temporarily moved top executives to cities like Singapore.

"This was the city of opportunity; everyone wanted to come here," said Eugenia Bae, a headhunter for international banks and financial firms. "Now it is no longer a popular city anymore."

Mr. Lee, who is largely unknown to the business community, has promised to restore Hong Kong's status as a thriving global hub. He has also said he would strengthen its financial ties with mainland China.

	<p>“We have the hope and the expectation that the next leadership will lead Hong Kong out of the pandemic and back on track,” said Frederik Gollob, chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.</p> <p>Felix Chung, a former lawmaker, met with Mr. Lee in early 2019, when the future chief executive was drafting a bill that would allow extradition to mainland China and other places — legislation that would soon trigger the citywide protests.</p> <p>At the time, many business leaders took issue with the bill’s scope, worrying that it would make them vulnerable to charges on the mainland, where a corruption crackdown was underway. When China first opened up its economy, Mr. Chung said, many businesses operated in legally dubious ways.</p> <p>After several meetings, Mr. Lee agreed to remove 9 of the 46 categories of crimes originally cited in the bill, largely easing the business leaders’ concerns. Whether Mr. Lee will be so willing to negotiate as chief executive is unclear, Mr. Chung said.</p> <p>“We cannot use our past experience to analyze the present situation because a lot of decisions are being made by Beijing,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Suicidal teens sleep in ERs every night
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/health/emergency-rooms-teen-mental-health.html
GIST	<p>On a rainy Thursday evening last spring, a 15-year-old girl was rushed by her parents to the emergency department at Boston Children’s Hospital. She had marks on both wrists from self-harm and a recent suicide attempt, and earlier that day she confided to her pediatrician that she planned to try again.</p> <p>At the E.R., a doctor examined her and explained to her parents that she was not safe to go home.</p> <p>“But I need to be honest with you about what’s likely to unfold,” the doctor added. The best place for adolescents in distress was not a hospital but an inpatient treatment center, where individual and group therapy would be provided in a calmer, communal setting, to stabilize the teens and ease them back to real life. But there were no openings in any of the treatment centers in the region, the doctor said.</p> <p>Indeed, 15 other adolescents — all in precarious mental condition — were already housed in the hospital’s emergency department, sleeping in exam rooms night after night, waiting for an opening. The average wait for a spot in a treatment program was 10 days.</p> <p>The girl and her family resigned themselves to a stay in the emergency room while she waited. But nearly a month went by before an inpatient bed opened up.</p> <p>The girl, being identified by her middle initial, G, to protect her privacy, spent the first week of her wait in a “psych-safe” room in the emergency department. Any equipment that might be used for harm had been removed. She was forbidden to use electronics — to keep her from searching the internet for ways to commit suicide or asking a friend to smuggle in a sharp object, as teens before her had done. Her door was kept open night and day so she could be monitored.</p> <p>It was “padded, insane-asylum-like,” she recalled recently in an interview. “Just walls — all you see is walls.”</p> <p>She grew “catatonic,” her mother recalled. “In this process of boarding we broke her worse than ever.”</p> <p>Mental health disorders are surging among adolescents: In 2019, 13 percent of adolescents reported having a major depressive episode, a 60 percent increase from 2007. Suicide rates, stable from 2000 to 2007, leaped nearly 60 percent by 2018, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>

G's story describes one of its starkest manifestations of the crisis. Across the country, hospital emergency departments have become boarding wards for teenagers who pose too great a risk to themselves or others to go home. They have nowhere else to go; even as the crisis has intensified, the medical system has failed to keep up, and options for inpatient and intensive outpatient psychiatric treatment have eroded sharply.

Nationally, the number of residential treatment facilities for people under the age of 18 fell to 592 in 2020 from 848 in 2012, a 30 percent decline, [according to the most recent federal government survey](#). The decline is partly a result of well-intentioned policy changes that did not foresee a surge in mental-health cases. Social-distancing rules and labor shortages during the pandemic have eliminated additional treatment centers and beds, experts say.

Absent that option, emergency rooms have taken up the slack. [A recent study](#) of 88 pediatric hospitals around the country found that 87 of them regularly board children and adolescents overnight in the E.R. On average, any given hospital saw four boarders per day, with an average stay of 48 hours.

"There is a pediatric pandemic of mental health boarding," said Dr. JoAnna K. Leyenaar, a pediatrician at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and the study's lead author. In an interview, she extrapolated from her research and other data to estimate that at least 1,000 young people, and perhaps as many as 5,000, board each night in the nation's 4,000 emergency departments.

"We have a national crisis," Dr. Leyenaar said.

This trend runs far afoul of the recommended best practices established by the Joint Commission, a nonprofit organization that helps set national health care policy. According to the standard, adolescents who come to the E.R. for mental health reasons should stay there no longer than four hours, as an extended stay can risk patient safety, delay treatment and divert resources from other emergencies.

Yet in 2021, the average adolescent boarding in the E.R. at Boston Children's Hospital spent nine days waiting for an inpatient bed, up from three and a half days in 2019; at Children's Hospital Colorado in Aurora in 2021, the average wait was eight days, and at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, it was six.

Emergency-department boarding has risen at small, rural hospitals, too, with "no pediatric or mental health specialists," said Dr. Christian Pulcini, a pediatrician in Vermont who has [studied](#) the trend in the state. "There is one clear conclusion," he told the Vermont legislature recently. "The E.D. is not the appropriate setting for children to get comprehensive, acute mental health services."

Doctors and hospital officials emphasize that adolescents should absolutely continue to come to the E.R. in a psychiatric emergency. Still, many emergency-room doctors and nurses, trained to treat broken bones, pneumonia and other corporeal challenges, said aid the ideal solution was more preventive care and community treatment programs.

"Frankly speaking, the E.D. is one of the worst places for a kid in mental health crisis to be," said Dr. Kevin Carney, a pediatric emergency room doctor at Children's Hospital Colorado. "I feel at a loss for how to help these kids."

'Actually a good day'

The challenge was evident one day in late February when Dr. Carney arrived for his shift at 3 p.m. The children's hospital has 50 exam rooms in its emergency department, which fill with patients who have gone through an initial screening and need further evaluation. By midafternoon, 43 of the rooms were full, 17 of them with mental health cases.

"It's breathtaking," Dr. Carney said as he stood in the hallway. "Forty percent."

On clocking in, Dr. Carney had inherited a block of 10 exam rooms from a doctor who was clocking out. “Seven are mental health issues,” Dr. Carney said. “Six are suicidal. Three of them made attempts.”

The adolescents who were deemed to be at physical risk to themselves or others could be readily identified: Their exam room doors were open so they could be monitored, and they wore maroon-colored scrubs instead of their own clothes. No shoelaces, belts or zippers.

Throughout the day, staff members at the hospital had called eight inpatient facilities in the region, looking for available slots in treatment centers where the 10 young boarders, as well as 17 other adolescents boarding at three smaller Colorado Children’s Hospital campuses around the state, could be placed.

One of the adolescents waiting in Aurora, a Denver suburb, was a 16-year-old who had been stabilized after attempting suicide and who needed a residential treatment spot. “But there are no beds,” Jessica Friedman, a social worker, said she had told the family.

“I have eight or nine conversations like this a day,” Ms. Friedman, standing in the hallway, told a reporter; so far that day she had had only two. “This is actually a good day.”

Standing nearby, Travis Justilian, a nurse and the interim clinic manager in the emergency department, said the flood of boarders “is crushing our staff.” He added, “We’re fixers and we’re sitting here doing nothing but watching them watch TV.”

Colorado is struggling with the same shortage of services that has hit hospitals nationwide. The state has lost 1,000 residential beds serving various adolescent populations since 2012, according to Heidi Baskfield, vice president of population health and advocacy for Children’s Hospital Colorado. The state closed one 500-bed facility, Ridgeview, which served at-risk young people, in 2021 [because of instances of poor quality and abuse](#). Another facility, [Excelsior, closed its 200 beds in 2017](#) because reimbursement rates were not high enough to support ongoing operations, the chief executive officer said at the time of the closing.

A major cause, Ms. Baskfield said, was the low reimbursement rates paid by Medicaid, the state insurance program. From 2006 to 2021, the daily Medicaid rate in Colorado allotted roughly \$400 for a therapeutic residential bed — “less than some families spend to send their kids for a night to sleepaway camp,” Ms. Baskfield said.

The low rates also accounted for some of the quality issues, she said; it was hard to hire experienced staff. (In the past year, Colorado has raised its reimbursement to \$750 per day by using money from the American Rescue Plan, but new beds have yet to open, and that source of money is temporary).

Lisette Burton, chief policy and practice adviser for the Association of Children’s Residential and Community Services, a nonprofit advocacy group, noted that the closure of facilities and the loss of beds was the result of many factors, including a well-intended, decades-long effort to keep foster children and other children out of institutional settings. But the intended substitutes — more nimble and specialized treatment options — were never funded and remain largely unavailable, she said.

Then came the pandemic, amplifying labor shortages and introducing social-distancing and quarantine guidelines that reduced the capacity for patients. “Demand went up, supply went down,” Ms. Burton said. “Now we’re in full-blown crisis.”

On that February day in Colorado, one inpatient bed finally opened up. It happened to be in the 12-bed inpatient ward of Children’s Hospital Colorado, just a few minutes’ walk from the E.R.

The ward’s hallways are wide, the walls painted light green and the lighting bright, to instill a feeling of comfort and calm. Each bedroom has windows looking outside and, next to the door, a glass panel enabling hospital staff to discreetly peer inside.

In a small communal room, four adolescent girls in maroon scrubs sat on blue chairs and couches. One listened to headphones and sang aloud to the soundtrack to “Encanto.” Another worked on a jigsaw puzzle of the sea. Two others chatted with a counselor.

The emergency department “is just a collection of rooms where patients are expected to stay in their rooms and comply with rules,” said Lyndsay Gaffey, director of patient care services at Children’s Hospital Colorado. In the inpatient ward, she said, the aim instead was to stabilize patients by having them work through trauma, receive therapy and interact with peers.

But they must be closely watched here, too. When a reporter rested a pen on a countertop, a staff member swept it up. “You cannot have this here unless it is on your person,” she said. “If a patient walks over and grabs it, it can basically be used as a weapon.”

Is it safe to go home?

In severe cases of mental distress, emergency-room doctors can compel an adolescent to board in the E.R. until inpatient services become available, however long that takes. Often, parents opt to return home with their child, to try to manage there while waiting for a treatment opening. But that option requires family and doctors alike to work through a difficult question: Is the adolescent safe to go home?

In early February, a 12-year-old boy, J, was struggling toward an answer at the emergency room of the Highlands Ranch campus of Children’s Hospital Colorado. (He is being identified by his first initial for privacy reasons.)

He had arrived that morning with his mother, after she discovered that he had been searching the internet for ways to commit suicide. Over the course of his day in the E.R., he was asked several times how safe he felt to go home. The mother recounted one exchange:

“Do you think you can go home?” the doctor asked.

“What’s the other option?” J asked.

“You’d be in the emergency room.”

“I can go home with my mom,” J said. “But if I feel like I’m going to kill myself, what do I do?”

“You’ll come back to the emergency room,” the doctor replied.

J’s mother took him home and “hid every medicine and every knife,” she said. J wanted to get help and asked her that first night: “So can I start tomorrow?”

No, his mother told him, he’d have to wait. Sixteen days went by before a spot for J opened in an intensive treatment program. She watched her son around the clock. “It was the scariest two weeks of my life,” she said.

The longest wait

For adolescents like G, who stayed in the emergency room of Boston Children’s Hospital last spring, the experience can be wrenching.

G lives in a Boston suburb with a teenage brother, father and mother. The family has a history of anxiety and depression, the mother said, but G had been a happy and adventurous child. In middle school she started talking back and acting somewhat obsessively, behavior that her mother figured was typical for a teenager.

What G’s mother did not know was that her daughter had been cutting herself for two years, since seventh grade, before the pandemic began. “I cut with literally anything I could find — hockey cards, pipe

cleaners, paper clips, anything,” G said. She described the self-harm as a “coping mechanism” to deal with inner pain. She hid the activity “with sweaters, hoodies, foundation.”

As the pandemic set in, G withdrew, and her grades fell. “Then came April 29,” her mother said. “We had a life before April 29 and a life after April 29.”

That day, she picked up G at school for a routine visit to the pediatrician. As G got into the car, her mother saw the marks on her wrists.

At the emergency room, G told the medical team she had tried to overdose a few weeks earlier and had regretted the next morning that she was still alive. In the exam room, she noticed a container of hand sanitizer. “I told them, ‘I’m thinking about drinking this,’” G recalled.

Admitting to her pain and self-harm provided her “with kind of a little bit of relief,” she said. “After two years of cutting and trying to kill myself, I was finally going to get some help. But I didn’t really get help.”

That first night, she was moved for safety reasons to a room that contained just a bed and, for her mother, a rollaway. With the door open, sleeping was difficult. “A sitter was literally staring at my kid,” G’s mother said. “It felt demoralizing.”

Mother and daughter played Uno, Go Fish, checkers and Connect Four. G, anxious and awake, received Ativan on three of the next four nights, then was prescribed Trazodone for chronic anxiety.

Boarding night after night in an emergency department can overwhelm some adolescents, said Dr. Amanda Stewart, an emergency room pediatrician at Boston Children’s. One day this February, she was treating an infant with a respiratory infection when she heard screaming. It came from a 12-year-old boy with attention-deficit disorder and autism who had threatened suicide and was boarding down the hall.

“Other patients started escalating,” Dr. Stewart recalled. “One of them, across the hall, started hitting her head against the wall.” The girl, 15, had entered the E.R. after a suicide attempt and had been calm until that point.

Dr. Stewart said that some teens tell her that boarding in the emergency department intensified their suicidal urges. “I’ve heard that from kids many times,” she said, recalling that they will say: “‘I’m not going to tell you next time, because it means I’m going to have to come here again.’”

Dr. Patricia Ibeziako, a child psychiatrist at Boston Children’s Hospital, said that adolescents do, in fact, receive some treatment while boarding in the emergency department, including basic counsel aimed at “crisis stabilization” that is “all geared to safety.”

“Boarding is not a great thing, but it’s still care,” Dr. Ibeziako said. “We’re not just putting a kid in a bed.”

Kid on fire

May 7 arrived — G’s eighth day in the emergency ward — and still no inpatient beds were available in the region. But a bed did open in the hospital, upstairs in the pediatric medical unit; this room had a window and a private bathroom, and a caregiver who watched G around the clock.

She “was very, very, very depressed and dejected,” her mother recalled. “She didn’t even cry anymore.”

Finally, 29 days after G arrived, a bed was located for her at an inpatient facility in an outlying suburb. She spent a week there but did not find the experience all that helpful.

“We learned the same coping skills over and over,” she said. Over the summer, she worked a fast-food job, but she continued cutting herself, she said, and did a better job of hiding it.

	<p>In the fall, she told a counselor at school that she planned to kill herself; she was quickly re-admitted to the same inpatient unit, given priority as a former patient, and spent two weeks there. When her stay ended, G went into an intensive outpatient program. But a counselor there told her mother that G needed more intensive care because she had described a plan to kill herself.</p> <p>“They told me, ‘This kid is on fire, she’s too acute to be here,’” G’s mother recalled. This time, the family went to the emergency room at a different Boston-area hospital, Salem Hospital, where G boarded only one night and, this time, was lucky to get a bed in that hospital’s inpatient unit, where she spent three weeks, until mid-October.</p> <p>G’s mood these days is “better than it was, but it still sucks,” she said recently. And, she added, “I’m better at covering things up more.”</p> <p>“Once people ask you a question, ‘Do you feel suicidal,’ you have to say nope,” she said. “You can’t tell them anything or they’ll send you to the hospital.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Covid mutating faster, more transmissible
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/nightmare-omicron-covid-variants-are-cracking-the-code-to-our-immunity-systems?ref=home
GIST	<p>You might not know it by looking around you at all those unmasked faces, but there’s still an awful lot of novel coronavirus out there. And the virus appears to be mutating faster than ever, producing steadily more contagious variants and subvariants.</p> <p>The evolutionary trend with SARS-CoV-2 might not mean there are definitely going to be big surges in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. At least not everywhere or for very long.</p> <p>But it underscores an uncomfortable truth: that despite the lifting of COVID restrictions in most countries that aren’t China, despite many people’s eagerness to move past the pain and uncertainty of the past two years, the pandemic isn’t over. The virus isn’t done mutating.</p> <p>The latest subvariants are the most transmissible yet. BA.4 and BA.5, both offspring of the Omicron variant, first appeared in South Africa last month. BA.2.12 and the closely related BA.2.12.1 first showed up in New York around the same time.</p> <p>BA.4 and BA.5 are 10 percent more contagious than their immediate predecessor, the BA.2 form of Omicron. BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1 are 25 percent more contagious. Equally alarmingly, BA.4, BA.5, BA.2.12 and B.2.12.1 are quickly becoming dominant in their respective regions of origin just a couple months after BA.2 became dominant. BA.2 for its part out-competed and replaced its own parent, BA.1, just a few months after BA.1 became dominant.</p> <p>In other words, major new subvariants seem to be coming at us faster and faster. In that sense, the virus might seem like it’s winning a genetic game of chance. Confronted with a semi-permeable barrier of antibodies from vaccines and past infection, the pathogen is becoming more transmissible.</p> <p>Immune pressure “will increase the rate of selection of those more fit variants that are circulating already in the population,” Edwin Michael, an epidemiologist at the Center for Global Health Infectious Disease Research at the University of South Florida, told The Daily Beast. “This will result in cascades of new variants appearing and spreading in the host population more frequently.”</p> <p>But this cascade of variants is one price we pay for our expanding, population-wide immunity. You can’t have the latter without getting some of the former. So while it might look like COVID is winning, in fact its genetic victories could be fleeting.</p>

Niema Moshiri, a geneticist at the University of California, San Diego, last year urged The Daily Beast to think of every COVID infection as a gambler playing a slot machine. Each individual infection tends to produce two mutations every two weeks, Moshiri explained. In other words, the virus gets two pulls of the lever twice a month, hoping to score a genetic jackpot that will give it some new advantage over other viruses—and some new way to infect its host.

“What if we had 50 million people pull slot-machine levers simultaneously at the same time?” Moshiri asked. “We would expect at least one person would hit the jackpot pretty quickly. Now, replace the slot machine with ‘clinically meaningful SARS-CoV-2 mutation,’ and that’s the situation we’re in.”

To complete the metaphor, add a mounting sense of urgency on the virus’s part as immunity looms higher all around it. Sensing threats all around it, the novel coronavirus is playing the slots with ever grimmer determination.

Throughout [the viral waves and crashes](#) of the last 30 months, there have never been fewer than several million active COVID cases. During the worst surges in early 2021 and early 2022, there were tens of millions of simultaneous infections. Given the high rate at which the SARS-CoV-2 mutates, it’s no wonder that the virus has produced a steady line of significant new variants—“lineage” is the scientific term.

There was Delta, the more virulent lineage that drove the worst waves of infections of 2021 while much of the world was just beginning to gain access to effective therapies and vaccines. In late 2021, scientists in Botswana and South Africa detected the first cases of a new lineage, Omicron.

Mutations along the spike protein, the part of the virus that helps it grab onto and infect our cells, make Omicron more contagious than Delta. On the worst day of the Omicron wave on Jan. 19, officials tallied no fewer than 4 million new infections in just 24 hours. That’s four times more cases than they counted on the worst days of the back-to-back Delta waves in January and April 2021.

Strong global vaccine-uptake, plus lingering antibodies in tens of millions of people owing to past infection, blunted the worst outcomes from Omicron. When Omicron first showed up, around half the world’s nearly 8 billion people had gotten at least one dose of vaccine. Today more than two-thirds are at least partially jabbed.

Add to that natural antibodies from hundreds of millions of past infections, and the human species’ wall of immunity looks pretty impressive. Breakthrough infections are common, but all those antibodies are really good at preventing the virus from causing serious illness that can end in death.

So cases went way up as Omicron became dominant, but deaths didn’t. On the deadliest day of the Omicron surge on Feb. 9, 13,000 people died globally—5,000 fewer than died on the worst day of Delta on Jan. 20, 2021.

More cases but fewer deaths, a phenomenon epidemiologists call “decoupling,” has come to define COVID’s evolution as we muddle through the third year of the pandemic. There are signs decoupling might actually get more extreme. After all, the immunity that leads to decoupling *also* spurs a virus to mutate more quickly into ever more transmissible lineages.

Immunity encourages mutants, which can increase immunity by seeding antibodies from mild infection. It’s an accelerating positive feedback loop whose products are antibodies and viral lineages.

A growing gap between infections and deaths might actually be the best-case scenario, absent the novel coronavirus miraculously “self-extincting” by running itself into a genetic corner. Many experts firmly believe an evolutionary dead end is wishful thinking when it comes to respiratory viruses. “I think self-extinction is vanishingly unlikely,” Jesse Bloom, an investigator at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Washington State, told The Daily Beast.

The bad news is, we probably need to learn to cope with ever more contagious SARS-CoV-2 variants and subvariants showing up faster and faster. The good news is that we know how to cope. BA.4, BA.5, BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1 do have some ability to get around our vaccine-induced and natural antibodies—“immune escape,” experts call it.

Some immune escape doesn’t mean total immune escape. Natural and vaccine antibodies still work. They’re the reason cases and deaths from the basic Omicron lineage decoupled. They’re the reason decoupling is likely with Omicron’s nasty little offspring, too. “The mutants do not seem to be as pathogenic as say, Delta,” Stephanie James, the head of a COVID testing lab at Regis University in Colorado, told The Daily Beast.

All that is to say, expect to hear a lot about new lineages and sublineages in the coming months as they appear and become dominant at an accelerating rate. Don’t be surprised if you catch one of them, even if you’re vaccinated and boosted and maybe even have antibodies from past infection.

But don’t panic. Keep up with your vaccinations and you’ll probably be OK.

Unless, of course, SARS-CoV-2’s evolution takes a dangerous turn. Immune escape has been pretty minor with all the major lineages and sublineages we’ve seen these past two years. That doesn’t mean the virus can’t evolve to achieve significant immune escape. If mutations are like the pathogen playing slots and a jackpot is a new variant, then a variant that can punch through our antibodies is a mega-jackpot.

If the virus ever wins that gamble, everything changes.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Teens jump into hot job market
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/teen-jobs-higher-pay-better-hours-teens-jump-into-hot-job-market-11651866919?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>Teenagers are coming to the rescue of business owners struggling to find enough workers in one of the hottest job markets in decades.</p> <p>Teens are now working in greater numbers than they have since before the 2008-09 financial crisis, when summer and part-time jobs were a more common rite of passage into adulthood, government statistics show. They have become particularly essential in the retail, tourism and hospitality industries, which many adults left behind during the pandemic.</p> <p>Unemployment among 16- to 19-year-old workers was at 10.2% in April, shy of the 68-year low of 9.6% it touched in May last year, according to figures released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Friday. Overall, about a third of U.S. teens in that age group are now working, the federal data show.</p> <p>Many business owners say finding teen hires can be difficult. They are scouting teen job fairs, making schedules more flexible and increasing training to accommodate and entice youthful recruits.</p> <p>For teens, the current conditions are shaping up to create one of the best summer job markets in years, complete with more options and, in many cases, better pay.</p> <p>Makayla McDonald, a 17-year-old in Montgomery, Ala., is returning to her lifeguarding job this summer. She first landed it a year ago as part of an effort by the city’s mayor to encourage teen work.</p> <p>“I really like working,” said Ms. McDonald, who divides her paychecks between college savings, church contributions, a fund for a loungewear business she hopes to start and spending money to get her hair or nails done. “My mom is a single mom, so I got to see the value of working hard and getting paid for it,” she said.</p>

Last summer, Ms. McDonald worked 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. six days a week manning a lifeguard stand in the Alabama heat and reminding swimmers to walk, not run, on the deck. The job had its challenges—frogs from a nearby creek would sometimes find their way into the pool. Still, she bonded with her co-workers and relished the \$10 an hour she earned.

Prepandemic, teen employment had been waning over five decades. Automation eliminated many low-wage jobs, while immigrants assumed others, according to economists.

More adults took up certain jobs to make ends meet in the aftermath of the 2008-09 financial crisis, often holding part-time positions that teen workers typically held before, according to Alicia Sasser Modestino, a labor economist who studies the youth workforce.

The lives of many teens changed as well. Extracurricular activities, unpaid internships and résumé-building volunteer opportunities filled hours that previously might have been spent stocking shelves or scooping ice cream.

Ms. McDonald, for example, balances attending one of the country's most rigorous high schools with participating in honor societies, student government, the debate team, the step team, softball and a variety of local volunteer positions.

Early pandemic lockdowns [drove teen unemployment](#) to a historic high of 31.9% in April 2020. Now, a tight labor market and [rising wages in hourly jobs](#) that teens are more likely to take are creating a jobs bonanza.

“Adult workers said, ‘I no longer want this crazy low-wage service job that has a ludicrous schedule, few benefits and rude customers,’” Ms. Modestino said. So “employers suddenly turned to youth.”

A summer jobs fair for teens in Arlington, Va., on a recent Saturday drew about 700 attendees, including roughly 100 parents—a more robust crowd than in recent jobs events for adults, according to organizers. The event, in person for the first time since 2019, helped teen job seekers connect with 30 employers for positions in retail, hospitality, restaurants, summer camps and water parks.

McCauley Masley, an eighth-grader who attended the fair, said she was seeking a job that would let her augment her allowance for trips to Target and CVS and meals with friends.

Plus, “I wanted to look into getting a job for experience as early as possible to put on résumés,” she said.

Though she felt nervous chatting with a representative from a local AMC theater, she said she plans to apply for a job there when she turns 14 in June. The job would be her first beyond some house- and pet-sitting gigs for relatives and friends.

Itai Ben Eli, a Houston restaurateur, said being someone's first employer comes with extra responsibilities but has been worth the investment. A nearly all-teen staff, which he said he lured with wage increases, made it possible for him to open a European-style bakery, Badolina, last June when he couldn't find the adult workers he needed.

He adjusted accordingly, expanding a 10-day training process into a month in which his new young hires shadow more-experienced workers, learn the menu, practice using a point of sale system and build confidence speaking with customers.

“We could shape and teach them what is important to us,” Mr. Ben Eli said. He has since promoted two of the teens he hired at Badolina to shift leader.

Shira Alatin, who is 17, started working at Badolina last summer when the pandemic upended her typical summer plans, such as an annual family trip to Israel. There, she cycled through different

	<p>responsibilities—clearing tables, delivering food and preparing coffee drinks. Her parents and older sister all started working young, so a job seemed like a natural way to fill time and earn money, she said.</p> <p>“I like the interactions,” said Ms. Alatin, who kept working at the bakery on weekends when school resumed. Later this month, she also begins a job as a hostess on weeknights at Hamsa, one of Mr. Ben Eli’s other restaurants. “A lot of Israelis come in; I’d speak to them in Hebrew, and they’d be really surprised,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Beijing residents’ faith zero-Covid strategy
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-residents-keep-faith-with-governments-zero-covid-strategy-11651996670?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>BEIJING—For weeks, Beijing has teetered on the edge of a hard, Covid-induced lockdown. For the most part, citizens are unruffled, confident that the restrictions that have paralyzed Shanghai for six weeks are simply unthinkable in the capital.</p> <p>In recent days, primary and secondary school classes have been forced to move online. Restaurants and bars have been closed to in-store dining, dozens of subway stations have been shut and supermarket shelves have been stripped bare and then restocked several times.</p> <p>None of this has been enough to bother Sun Yanxu, a 35-year-old delivery driver who moved to Beijing earlier this year. “I haven’t stockpiled anything and don’t think it’s necessary,” he said, adding that he didn’t have a problem with the government’s handling of the outbreaks and didn’t think Beijing would be locked down.</p> <p>“I believe in the government and think all the restrictions are correct and it’s just a matter of people obeying them or not,” Mr. Sun said. Though Mr. Sun said Beijing’s tightening Covid-19 restrictions haven’t yet hampered his movements, the native of the central Chinese province of Shanxi said his income had been hit by the stricter rules.</p> <p>Similarly, Lü Xiyao, a 28-year-old yoga instructor from the neighboring province of Hubei, said she didn’t feel a need to stock up on groceries, confident that Beijing would avoid a Shanghai-style lockdown.</p> <p>Even so, Ms. Lü, who was eating lunch with a friend outside a shopping mall in central Beijing on a recent afternoon because of the ban on indoor dining, hopes that the restrictions will be lifted soon. She said she is being paid only a basic salary, without the extra money she would ordinarily receive for teaching classes.</p> <p>“If the situation persists for too long, I’ll just have to go home,” Ms. Lü said.</p> <p>As most of the world relaxes its Covid restrictions following a global surge in cases caused by the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus, China has stuck with its zero-tolerance approach. The effort to stamp out infection clusters has led to full or partial lockdowns on dozens of cities, affecting hundreds of millions of people.</p> <p>After a Thursday meeting, the Communist Party’s ruling Politburo issued a statement redoubling its commitment to strict pandemic controls. “We won the battle in Wuhan, and we will surely be able to win the battle in Shanghai,” the Politburo said, drawing a comparison between the Chinese financial capital hardest hit by the current outbreak and the city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged more than two years ago.</p> <p>On Sunday, Chinese health authorities recorded 4,243 new locally transmitted infections nationwide for the prior day, with Shanghai accounting for almost all of them. The megacity of 25 million people, now in the sixth week of its lockdown, reported 3,840 new infections, marking the fifth consecutive day in which there were fewer than 5,000 daily cases and the lowest daily count since March 27.</p>

Even so, restrictions in Shanghai have only partially eased, allowing residents in some areas of the city to leave their apartments but not their residential compounds. On Saturday, Shanghai municipal officials postponed citywide college-entrance exams.

Beijing, meantime, has rolled a steady drumbeat of tightening measures in recent weeks that have prompted a small number of residents to flee the city and many others to restock their pantries.

While cases in the capital have been rising, new infections have yet to pass 100 on a daily basis. On Saturday afternoon, municipal health authorities announced 78 cases in the previous 24 hours, Beijing's highest daily count during the current outbreak.

"The current trajectory of cases suggests the risk of a full lockdown is low," Ernan Cui, an analyst at consulting firm Gavekal Dragonomics, told clients in a note Friday. "Beijing appears to be developing a new model of Covid containment based on frequent testing...in order to spot and isolate new chains of transmission before cases reach even low levels."

Even so, she warned, "the risk that new outbreaks or a new variant will result in another wave of lockdowns in the future is still there, and will be until China makes a more fundamental shift in its Covid policies."

Authorities in the capital on Saturday began a new round of mass testing in five districts, as well as areas that have reported positive tests since April 25. More than 60 subway stations in Beijing have been closed, while dining-in at restaurants has been barred for more than a week.

Late Friday, authorities in Chaoyang district, Beijing's most populous, ordered indoor entertainment venues, gyms and training centers to close until further notice. Office workers in the district were also instructed to work from home; the offices of government agencies and state-owned companies are now capped at 50% occupancy.

A negative Covid result from within the prior 48 hours had already been needed to enter many venues. Since Thursday, the list of activities requiring a negative test was expanded to include getting married, Beijing's Civil Affairs Bureau said in an announcement posted on its website.

That addition prompted a torrent of satirical responses on social media. "When finding a good marriage partner, one used to consult a fortuneteller. Later, it became an astrologer. Now, it's a negative Covid test," one internet user joked on China's Twitter-like Weibo.

Despite the new measures, Beijing residents remain relatively sanguine about the prospects of authorities imposing tighter restrictions.

"I don't think Beijing will repeat what's happening in Shanghai, where officials didn't control Covid properly in the early stages," said Mr. Zhou, who declined to give his full name. "Beijing is the capital city, after all."

The 30-year-old native of the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin moved to Beijing earlier this year to work in sales, said he hadn't loaded up on groceries and felt no need to do so.

"The supermarkets are full of supplies and stockpiling will only push prices higher," Mr. Zhou said, adding that restrictions on restaurants and public transportation were reasonable measures that didn't affect his own personal life.

"I'm relatively optimistic about the current situation in Beijing," he said, though he predicted it would take several years before the virus is a thing of the past. "It's up to officials to make the policies. I trust the government and don't think there will be a citywide lockdown."

	<p>Nearby, Ms. Huang, who said she worked in a Beijing supermarket and who also declined to give her full name, recalled stockpiling essentials when Covid first burst out in early 2020. This time around, Ms. Huang hadn't bothered, even as she watched customers clean out her store's shelves in recent weeks.</p> <p>"Beijing should have learned a lesson from Shanghai," she reasoned. "And the government has done a good job in ensuring supplies."</p> <p>Not everyone is so optimistic. One local real-estate agent in his 40s said that while Beijing would likely be spared a Shanghai-style lockdown, he lamented the ban on indoor dining and said he was deeply troubled by the harshness of the measures taken by the authorities across the country.</p> <p>"It's all too much. Everywhere you go, there's a lockdown," said the man, who declined to be identified by his full name and gave his surname as Wang. "Something's really wrong... People from high up don't see the hardship that people at the bottom have to endure."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Russia rehearses WWII victory parade
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-rehearses-annual-wwii-victory-parade-as-fighting-continues-in-ukraine-11651937007?mod=series_rusukrainenato
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Russia staged a dress rehearsal with jet fighters flying in “Z” formations above columns of tanks and infantry to mark the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, as President Vladimir Putin sought to cement public support for his military offensive in Ukraine.</p> <p>May 9 is one of the most important holidays in Russia, with the annual parade paying tribute to those who fought and died in what is called the Great Patriotic War here. And this year, the celebrations come at a delicate time for Mr. Putin. Western intelligence analysts say the Kremlin had anticipated a quick end to the war in Ukraine after Russia invaded the country in February, in what Western officials say was an attempt to topple the government in Kyiv.</p> <p>But faced with stiff resistance from Ukrainian forces, Russia’s military has refocused its mission on the country’s east, stepping up attacks on railways, electrical-power facilities and points from which Western weapons and ammunition are flowing into the country. In turn, Russia has accused Ukraine of sporadic attacks and acts of sabotage on its territory in recent weeks.</p> <p>Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said the U.S. and its allies in the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization are fighting a proxy war against Moscow by backing Kyiv.</p> <p>“There is generally a global, full war between the EU countries and the United States of America and our country,” said Pavel Danilin, director of the Center for Political Analysis, a pro-Kremlin think tank. “It is very sad that the West is trying to cancel Russia.”</p> <p>As May 9 approaches, there has been speculation among some Western officials and analysts that Mr. Putin will declare triumph in the Kremlin’s offensive in Ukraine, or, more likely, some say, announce that his forces are digging in for what could become a protracted war.</p> <p>Saturday’s rehearsal was staged with a likely goal of emphasizing Russia’s military strength. Heading the column of mechanized hardware were Russia’s legendary Soviet-era T-34 tanks, followed by a series of modern tanks, infantry-fighting vehicles, Iskander short-range ballistic-missile systems and—appearing for the first time at a Red Square parade, according to state media—Tornado-G multiple-launch rocket systems.</p> <p>More than 10,000 service personnel, including officers, cadets and members of the All-Russian Cossack Army, marched in formation across the open plaza between the Kremlin and the GUM department store, which was draped in banners declaring “Happy Victory Day” and an iconic image of a Red Army soldier</p>

raising the Soviet flag over the Reichstag, the seat of the German parliament in World War II. Hundreds of spectators filled the stands.

When the parade takes place on Monday, one of its most carefully choreographed events will be the arrival of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in Red Square, in full dress uniform and chauffeured in an elegant black ZIL convertible, to review the troops. During Saturday's rehearsal, a stand-in filled his role. Mr. Putin will also give an address.

The dummy-run featured almost 80 aircraft and helicopters, including the Mil Mi-26, billed as the world's largest transport helicopter.

And in what state media said was another first, eight MiG-29 fighters took to the skies over Red Square and formed the letter "Z," which has become a patriotic symbol to rally Russians around the Kremlin's military action in Ukraine.

In past years, Moscow invited dozens of heads of state to the parade, including former President Barack Obama and European leaders, almost all of whom boycotted the parade in 2015, the year after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine's south. The Kremlin said it didn't invite any foreign leaders to this year's event.

Victory is important for Mr. Putin, "but it doesn't mean that he should achieve this by any means" by May 9, said Nikolai Petrov, a senior research fellow with the Russia and Eurasia Program at Chatham House in London. "We don't see any probability of clear victory in this event prior to May 9."

Mr. Putin has sought to portray the Ukraine campaign, which he calls a special military operation, as a continuation of Russia's World War II fight against Nazis and fascism—loaded terms in Russia, which suffered tremendous losses. In all, some 27 million Soviet citizens died in the war.

"The results of the Second World War, as well as the sacrifices made by our people on the altar of victory over Nazism, are sacred," Mr. Putin told Russians on Feb. 24, the day he sent troops into Ukraine.

Oleg Matveichev, a pro-Putin lawmaker in Russia's State Duma, the lower house of parliament, said that "the relevance of antifascism has become much greater. This is not just a memory in honor of that victory [in World War II], but it is also an understanding that fascism has not gone anywhere...and that the fight in Ukraine is the same fight against fascism," he said.

Moscow since the start of the war [has pushed a false claim](#) that the government in Kyiv is run by Nazis. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish and grew up speaking Russian, has argued that given the loss of more than eight million Ukrainians during World War II, his people could never support such an ideology.

But many Russians believe the Kremlin's narrative and support Mr. Putin's war against its former Soviet vassal, according to independent and state polls, particularly as the full effect of [economic sanctions from the West](#) have still to [be felt by many ordinary people](#).

"I think this is the reason for Putin and for the Kremlin in general not to be in a hurry with any kind of demonstrated victory," Mr. Petrov, the Chatham House research fellow, said. "They still have some time before the results of the economic sanctions will be felt by ordinary Russians. So, they do have some time to achieve victory or to prepare for announcing any symbolic victory."

The extent of Russia's military losses hasn't fully filtered through to the wider population, either. The Russian Defense Ministry says 1,351 soldiers had been killed in the conflict as of March 25. U.K. officials estimated late last month that 15,000 Russian soldiers had died. Government officials and pro-Kremlin supporters say the casualty toll provided by Western officials is designed to promote the West's propaganda effort.

The losses reported by Western officials and analyses from European military experts that say Russia is failing in military goals in Ukraine have caused some Western and Ukrainian defense and intelligence officials to surmise that Mr. Putin will use May 9 to declare a national mass mobilization of its army and citizens.

The Kremlin and pro-Putin analysts have dismissed these assertions as baseless rumors.

Mr. Danilin, at the Center for Political Analysis, said the only mobilization planned would be “in terms of the unity of society, and of course there will be a call for this,” he said. “The holiday itself is the day of unity of our people, who were able to survive this most brutal war. But no military mobilization is expected. There is absolutely no need for this.”

Mr. Matveichev, who represents the ruling United Russia party in the State Duma, said that as far as he knows, there are 500,000 personnel involved in the operation in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region, and that “we have an army of more than a million people.” He added, “The active army is enough for this.”

Some analysts say this year’s celebrations are likely to be more muted because of the military operations under way. But presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed such suggestions, telling reporters on Friday that little could eclipse such an important touchstone for Russians.

This “is a sacred day, this is a key holiday, which is really full of symbolism, and a sense of pain for the sacrifices that we have suffered, and a sense of pride in our country and for our victory,” he said. “Therefore, nothing will overshadow it and from the point of view of national pride, the significance of this holiday is...impossible to overestimate,” he said.

Mr. Petrov at Chatham House predicts the symbolism of the parade will be used to draw a direct historical link between the victory in World War II and the offensive in Ukraine.

“They will use certain analogies,” he said, but the parade “will play a different role because it will not commemorate the past victory, but will demonstrate the strength of the Russian army now.”

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HEADLINE	05/08 Ukraine civilians risked lives battle of Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-ukrainian-civilians-risked-their-lives-to-help-win-the-battle-for-kyiv-11652002200?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>NOVYI BYKIV, Ukraine—As Ukraine’s forces fought to repel Russian troops from the Kyiv region, Ukrainian villagers along Highway 7 battled in their own way: calling in Ukrainian artillery strikes on a vital lifeline that Russia had mapped out for its assault on the capital.</p> <p>At great risk to themselves, the villagers shared tips and Google map locations with local authorities, turning the highway that runs between the Russian border and Kyiv into a big logistical defeat for Moscow. The intelligence they gleaned helped bring Ukrainian fire on numerous Russian units.</p> <p>The strategy underscored fierce Ukrainian resistance as villagers put themselves and their homes on the front lines, turning quiet village life into an uneasy and sometimes deadly coexistence with Russian troops.</p> <p>“Everyone here was doing all they could to get Russian troop movement across to our boys,” said Natalia Mohilni, a homemaker in Novyi Bykiv, who had called in soldier locations in and around the village, where locals said the Russians had set up a mobile crematorium to discard the dead.</p> <p>Ms. Mohilni’s own two-story house was shelled during exchanges, and a firefight with Ukrainian soldiers ultimately leveled the village’s main hospital, where Russian troops had stored ammunition and armored personnel carriers.</p>

“No one wants the destruction, but we wanted the Russians even less,” she said. “Not having a chimney means we need to wait to use the wood oven, but that’s fine.”

The [strikes against the incoming Russian formations](#) prevented crucial reinforcements and supplies from reaching Kyiv from the east, leaving Moscow’s troops undermanned and undersupplied, said Ukrainian officials and defense analysts. By the end of March, Russia had decided its attempt to seize Kyiv had failed and repositioned its forces in the country’s east.

Russia’s most concentrated push on Kyiv came from the north, where successive columns of armor tried to take the capital. But the Russians depended heavily on a much longer supply route on Highway 7, a 230-mile route from the Ukrainian city of Sumy to near Kyiv. It was there that Ukrainian resistance deepened organizational problems the Russians were facing.

Military analysts say Russia’s military hadn’t overcome many of the logistical problems suffered by the Soviet Union-era Red Army. Over history, logistical problems have undermined many military campaigns, with armies facing tight budgets sometimes skimping on logistics to focus on new weapons and fighting forces.

One of the biggest battles fought around Highway 7 was around the Kyiv suburb of Brovary, where two regiments of Russia’s 90th Guards Tank Division were ambushed by Ukrainian antitank weaponry and artillery strikes that targeted the front and the back of the Russian column.

Tetyana Chornovol, a former Ukrainian lawmaker who fought Russian troops with antitank weaponry in the battle of Brovary, said the intelligence that villagers provided on the highway was crucial for artillery units.

Villagers who came under Russian occupation along this road in late February struggled to tell Ukrainian authorities about positions of Russians troops, artillery and tanks. Early in the occupation, Ukrainians called the point of contact they were most familiar with, the police.

“There were very professional divisions of Russian soldiers traveling between Sumy and Brovary, and these divisions tried to hide in forests and so the information was crucial,” said Andriy Nebytov, police chief for the Kyiv region.

To streamline the process for Ukrainian defenders, the country’s Ministry of Digital Transformation launched chatbots on the popular Telegram messaging app that let Ukrainians share Russian troop locations online in a single database that went through the country’s Security Service. The capital’s Kyiv Digital app, which once helped people pay parking tickets and notify residents of temporary water cuts, was reconfigured to help users spot Russian troop movements and provide it to the military staff of the Armed Forces.

“The information was all given to the general staff and it was checked out, triangulated with other data and if the information was confirmed we would shoot to kill,” said Oleg Zhdanov, an independent Ukrainian military expert. “The information was particularly important during the first weeks of the conflict when columns of armor were coming straight down the road.”

In the following weeks, he added, the ability to stop fuel, water and food supplies helped degrade the performance of Russia’s troops around Kyiv.

The platforms gave instructions to provide “location, movement, volume of military equipment and personnel of the occupier.” Others explained to villagers how to drop pins on Google maps to send into security services and reminded users to delete their messages to prevent being caught by Russian troops.

“Everything I had on my phone I deleted as soon as I sent it,” said Natalia Yermak, a villager from Staryi Bykiv who said she used the app to inform on tanks traveling down the main street.

[Others were less lucky.](#)

In mid-March, 15 Russian servicemen broke into the nearby house of Viktoria Andrusha, who had been sending the types and numbers of Russian armor to a Ukrainian police officer, her father said. She was detained on March 24 and hasn't been heard from since, he said.

By the time the Russians pulled back from their attempt on Kyiv they had already been convinced they were surrounded by enemies.

Galina, a retiree from the village of Priputny, which was on a route for Russian troops going into and pulling out of the Kyiv region, said Russian troops as they were leaving [commandeered her house](#), where dozens stayed the night in the beds, the floors and in the yard.

"When they left, they set it on fire and left behind a blaze," she said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Electricity shortage warnings across US
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/electricity-shortage-warnings-grow-across-u-s-11652002380?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>From California to Texas to Indiana, electric-grid operators are warning that power-generating capacity is struggling to keep up with demand, a gap that could lead to rolling blackouts during heat waves or other peak periods as soon as this year.</p> <p>California's grid operator said Friday that it anticipates a shortfall in supplies this summer, especially if extreme heat, wildfires or delays in bringing new power sources online exacerbate the constraints. The Midcontinent Independent System Operator, or MISO, which oversees a large regional grid spanning much of the Midwest, said late last month that capacity shortages may force it to take emergency measures to meet summer demand and flagged the risk of outages. In Texas, where a number of power plants lately went offline for maintenance, the grid operator warned of tight conditions during a heat wave expected to last into the next week.</p> <p>The risk of electricity shortages is rising throughout the U.S. as traditional power plants are being retired more quickly than they can be replaced by renewable energy and battery storage. Power grids are feeling the strain as the U.S. makes a historic transition from conventional power plants fueled by coal and natural gas to cleaner forms of energy such as wind and solar power, and aging nuclear plants are slated for retirement in many parts of the country.</p> <p>The challenge is that wind and solar farms—which are among the cheapest forms of power generation—don't produce electricity at all times and need large batteries to store their output for later use. While a large amount of battery storage is under development, regional grid operators have lately warned that the pace may not be fast enough to offset the closures of traditional power plants that can work around the clock.</p> <p>Speeding the build-out of renewable energy and batteries has become an especially difficult proposition amid supply-chain challenges and inflation. Most recently, a probe by the Commerce Department into whether Chinese solar manufacturers are circumventing trade tariffs on solar panels has halted imports of key components needed to build new solar farms and effectively brought the U.S. solar industry to a standstill.</p> <p>Faced with the prospect of having to call for blackouts when demand exceeds supply, many grid operators are now grappling with the same question: How to encourage the build-out of batteries and other new technologies while keeping traditional power plants from closing too quickly.</p> <p>"Every market around the world is trying to deal with the same issue," said Brad Jones, interim chief executive of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates the state's power grid. "We're all</p>

trying to find ways to utilize as much of our renewable resources as possible...and at the same time make sure that we have enough dispatchable generation to manage reliability.”

The risk of outages resulting from supply constraints comes amid other challenges straining the reliability of the grid. Large, sustained outages [have occurred with greater frequency](#) over the past two decades, in part because the grid has become more vulnerable to failure with age and an uptick in [severe weather events exacerbated by climate change](#). A push to electrify home heating and cooking, and the [expected growth of electric vehicles](#), may increase power demand in coming years, putting further pressure on the system.

California regulators on Friday said as much as 3,800 megawatts of new supplies may face delays through 2025. Such delays would pose a major challenge for the state, which is racing to procure a huge amount of renewable energy and storage to offset the closure of several gas-fired power plants, as well as a nuclear plant. Gov. Gavin Newsom recently said he would consider moving to keep that nuclear plant, Diablo Canyon, online to reduce the risk of shortages.

“We need to make sure that we have sufficient new resources in place and operational before we let some of these retirements go,” said Mark Rothleder, chief operating officer of the California Independent System Operator, which operates the state’s power grid. “Otherwise, we are putting ourselves potentially at risk of having insufficient capacity.”

The reliability question has stirred strong debate in Texas, where a freak winter storm last year [caused power plants of all kinds to trip offline](#), forcing the grid operator to call for [dayslong blackouts](#) to keep supply in line with demand. Many problems played a part—some power plants weren’t prepared for subfreezing temperatures, while others couldn’t operate for lack of fuel—but the failures collectively exposed the vulnerability of the state’s power market, and [resulted in calls for change](#).

Texas is now debating what would be a major philosophical shift for its power market: paying power generators ahead of time for resources that might be needed, instead of just compensating them for actual power sold. That approach would largely benefit incumbent generators including [NRG Energy](#) Inc. and [Vistra](#) Corp., which own numerous conventional power plants with the potential to profit from such contracts.

The idea has prompted pushback from some battery and renewable-energy companies, including Eolian LP, which has proposed incentives for batteries, small gas turbines and other technologies capable of quickly ramping up to meet increases in electricity demand.

“The most important thing we heard after the freeze was we need to keep the lights on and make sure this grid is reliable,” said Peter Lake, chairman of the Public Utility Commission of Texas. “There’s nothing worse than turning Texas off.”

The MISO, which recently warned of potential supply shortages resulting from higher-than-expected summer demand, has lately undertaken an effort to better value different types of resources based on their ability to support the grid at different times during the year and under various conditions. It is also working to improve the transfer of power across regions when needed.

MISO Chief Executive John Bear said those processes will help the grid operator as the energy transition progresses, but he foresees the risk of near-term shortages. The grid operator has more frequently resorted to emergency measures to shore up supplies in recent years.

“I am concerned about it,” Mr. Bear said. “As we move forward, we need to know that when you put a solar panel or a wind turbine up, it’s not the same as a thermal resource,” such as gas or coal.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-airstrike-kills-villagers-taking-shelter-at-school-ukraine-says-11651999227?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>KHARKIV, Ukraine—A Russian airstrike is believed to have killed some 60 villagers who had taken refuge in a school in the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk, authorities there said, as heavy fighting raged across the country.</p> <p>The airstrike, late Saturday in the village of Bilohorivka, hit a school and a nearby concert hall, causing a fire. By the time the fire was extinguished hours later, rescuers had pulled out 30 survivors and found two bodies, while some 60 others who remain under the rubble are presumed dead, said Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai.</p> <p>Footage released by Mr. Haidai showed a smoldering crater above what used to be the school’s basement.</p> <p>“The Russians don’t care whom they kill. If they can’t kill a soldier, they kill an innocent child,” Mr. Haidai said in a social-media post. Ukraine’s rescue service said it would continue looking for possible survivors in Bilohorivka on Sunday.</p> <p>Russian authorities didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Russian forces have made significant advances in the Luhansk region in recent days, with the Wagner mercenary group taking most of the strategic town of Popasna and other troops inching closer to the capital of the Ukrainian-administered part of the region, Severodonetsk.</p> <p>Only a small part of the region remains under Ukrainian control, and authorities have urged all civilians to leave.</p> <p>Russia’s President Vladimir Putin in February recognized the independence of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics, statelets created by Moscow in 2014 in the part of eastern Ukraine collectively known as Donbas.</p> <p>After pulling forces from the vicinity of Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, in late March, Mr. Putin declared what he called the liberation of Donbas as the war’s key goal. He later cited the seizure of the city of Mariupol, where Ukrainian defenders remain holed up in the Azovstal steel plant compound, as a major success.</p> <p>While Russian forces are making slow but steady progress in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, they have suffered significant setbacks in the Kharkiv region to the north.</p> <p>In a counteroffensive, Ukrainian troops this weekend continued pushing north and northeast of Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-most populous city, after ousting Russian forces from key towns in its immediate vicinity. At the same time, Ukrainian troops attacked the flank of the Russian troops advancing toward Donbas, striking west of the city of Izyum, according to reports from both sides.</p> <p>Ukraine is also continuing its campaign to deny Russian forces the use of the strategic Snake Island southwest of the Black Sea port of Odessa. Russia captured the island on the first day of the war, Feb. 24.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military, which struck two Raptor-class Russian patrol boats near the island last week, said this weekend it hit a Serna-type landing craft with an air-defense system aboard, and two more Raptor vessels. Drone footage released by the Ukrainian military showed a vessel exploding and an airstrike on the island by what appeared to be Ukrainian jet fighters.</p> <p>Another video, released on Sunday, showed a drone strike hitting what appeared to be a Russian helicopter as troops were disembarking on the island.</p> <p>Russia’s Defense Ministry said Sunday it destroyed four Ukrainian warplanes, four helicopters and a Ukrainian landing vessel near Snake Island. It offered no evidence. Ministry officials haven’t commented on the claimed Ukrainian strikes against the Russian navy.</p>

	<p>Ukrainian officials have warned that Moscow may be planning a particularly heavy series of strikes on Monday, when Russia commemorates the Soviet Union's victory in World War II. Some regions, such as Odessa, have announced a curfew from Sunday evening to Monday morning.</p> <p>Western officials and analysts expect Mr. Putin to use Monday's event to address the war in Ukraine, possibly declaring victory or, in what some see as a more likely scenario, pledging to carry on the fight.</p> <p>Mr. Putin might call for a mass mobilization of Russia's army and its citizens, some Western and Ukrainian defense and intelligence officials have speculated. The Kremlin has brushed off such talk as unfounded rumors.</p> <p>The U.S. has provided critical military gear for Ukraine's defense, and President Biden on Friday announced another round of security assistance to Ukraine that will include artillery munitions, radar systems and other equipment.</p> <p>An administration official said the equipment, valued at up to \$150 million, will include artillery rounds, counterartillery radars, jamming equipment, field equipment and spare parts.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Tech industry's epic 2-year run sputters
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-tech-industrys-epic-two-year-run-sputters-11652002382?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>The technology industry, which powered the U.S. economy during the pandemic and grew at tremendous scale during a decade of ultralow interest rates, is confronting one of the most punishing stretches in years.</p> <p>Global powerhouses and fledgling startups are feeling pain from a variety of economic, industry and market factors, spawning postpandemic turbulence in e-commerce, digital advertising, electric vehicles, ride-hailing and other segments.</p> <p>Companies that emerged as job-creating juggernauts in the past two years—collectively adding hundreds of thousands of workers to their payrolls in engineering, warehouse and delivery jobs—have begun to freeze hiring or even lay off employees.</p> <p>Concerned that some of the forces that have propelled tech ever upward have begun to fade, investors have sent share prices for a number of companies, including Lyft Inc. LYFT -6.90% ▼ and Peloton Interactive Inc. PTON -7.70% ▼ plunging on disappointing financial results or other news. The stocks of Netflix Inc. NFLX -3.90% ▼ Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc. FB -2.17% ▼ and Amazon.com Inc. AMZN -1.40% ▼ all are down more than 30% this year, exceeding the more-than-13% drop in the S&P 500.</p> <p>Investors are divided on the question of whether the slowdown is temporary—as well-positioned companies work through a period of stagnation after expanding ultrafast in recent years—or if these are the early signs of a deeper retrenchment for the industry and its investors.</p> <p>“The market went on a tear,” said Kevin Holt, a senior portfolio manager at Invesco, which has more than \$1.6 trillion under management and owns shares in major technology companies. Shareholders are trying to discern whether they have focused too much on growth during a time when interest rates were historically low. “Were these tech stocks unrealistically valued because of that?” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Holt and others are asking whether it is time for some tech companies to scale back their ambitions. “I’ve never seen a company in any industry try to be everything to everybody and be successful,” he said.</p> <p>Even as some tech companies have faced a withering season, the job market has remained strong in the U.S., with no broad signs of a hit from a tech slowdown. Employers added 428,000 jobs in April—the</p>

12th month of gains above 400,000—and the unemployment rate remained at 3.6%; U.S. gross domestic product [fell at a 1.4% annual rate](#) in the first quarter.

And while certain segments of the tech industry are hurting, bright spots remain. Cloud computing, which has grown tremendously in the pandemic, remains highly profitable and a high-growth business for Amazon, [Microsoft Corp. MSFT -0.94%▼](#) and others.

Throughout the pandemic, Amazon and Facebook were among tech companies that hired rapidly as they accelerated growth. Amazon added about 800,000 workers in 2020 and 2021 [in a hiring spree](#) unlike anything in recent history as it sought to meet huge demand for its e-commerce services. In the past five years, Meta, [Apple Inc., AAPL 0.47%▲](#) Microsoft and Google parent [Alphabet Inc. GOOG -0.93%▼](#) nearly doubled their combined number of full-time employees to a collective total of about 563,000.

Technology companies delivered the type of growth rarely found in other parts of the economy. In 2020, Meta, Amazon, Google, Apple and Microsoft collectively [produced \\$1.1 trillion in sales](#), eclipsing the GDP of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, according to World Bank data. The pandemic only strengthened the tech industry's dominance. As the economy shut down, many consumers relied on technology like never before—helping lift the fortunes and share prices of online retailers, videoconferencing platforms and streaming services to new heights.

A confluence of factors has upended that dynamic this year. Inflation is running at a four-decade high, pressuring wages for drivers and warehouse workers and crimping consumer spending power. Rising interest rates have started to damp the flood of capital seeking high returns in tech investments. The reopening of bricks-and-mortar restaurants and stores has sapped demand for items ordered online, prompting e-commerce companies to recalibrate their expansion. Covid-19 lockdowns in China are creating new supply-chain disruptions for iPhones and other gadgets.

Amazon in late April reported the [slowest quarterly revenue growth](#) in about two decades, as its e-commerce machine has decelerated recently while operating expenses have grown faster than sales. Executives have said Amazon's warehousing capacity has exceeded its demand, and that it was overstaffed in some areas.

Meta said this past week that it would halt, or in some cases slow, [hiring for mid- to senior-level positions](#), seven months after it announced major new hiring and investment for its push into the so-called metaverse.

[Netflix lost subscribers](#) during its first quarter for the first time in more than a decade and signaled that losses are set to continue—news that caused investors to shave \$54 billion off its market value in one day. The streaming service blamed its results in part on account sharing and increased competition.

Apple cautioned that the resurgence of Covid-19 in China could threaten to hinder sales by as much as \$8 billion in the current quarter.

“Investors want to take off risk, and [technology] is the easiest place to do it,” said Mark Stoeckle, chief executive of investment firm Adams Funds. “Many of these stocks were built up with the thought that the coast is clear as far as we can see, and that's not necessarily the case right now.”

Many smaller public companies and startups have fared worse.

E-commerce companies [eBay Inc. EBAY 1.60%▲](#) and [Etsy Inc., ETSY -5.00%▼](#) whose sales accelerated during the health crisis, this past week both forecast weaker-than-expected sales for the current quarter, sending their stock prices plunging. And investors have turned sour on electric-vehicle startups such as Rivian Automotive Inc.

Layoffs have also recently happened at upstarts such as rapid-delivery startup GoPuff, investment platform [Robinhood Markets](#) Inc. [HOOD -4.62% ▼](#) and celebrity video app Cameo. Other companies find themselves wrestling for talent despite the slowdown.

“The war for talent is so extreme,” said Will Price, founder and general partner at tech investment company Next Frontier Capital. “You are seeing a slowing economy. You see revenue forecast concern at the same time. And you’re losing employees to your competitors, and the employees you are keeping need to get paid 8% to 9% more every year just to stay up with inflation. It feels like companies are getting squeezed from two sides.”

Some investors said they plan to avoid some areas—such as semiconductor designers or companies that surged due to pandemic-related demand—and to look for opportunity in others.

“The way I’m looking at it is, get your shopping list out,” said Robert Schein, chief investment officer of Palm Desert, Calif.-based Blanke Schein Wealth Management. He added that his firm has primarily focused on older technology companies with strong balance sheets, as opposed to younger startups with less of a track record behind them.

That said, Mr. Schein, like many other investors, is concerned about how rising rates may unfavorably impact technology stocks’ valuations. Generally, investors are less willing to pay a premium for technology stocks when they can get growing, guaranteed returns from government bonds.

“I don’t know that we’re going to be as aggressively buying if interest rates continue to spiral higher,” Mr. Schein said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Day 74 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/08/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-74-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dozens of people are feared dead after Russian bombs hit a school in the eastern Ukraine village of Bilohorivka where 90 people were sheltering, according to the governor of Luhansk. He said at least two bodies had been pulled from the rubble and 60 more are feared dead.• Russian forces fired six cruise missiles at the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa on Saturday and continued to bombard a besieged steel mill in Mariupol. Russia appears to want to complete their conquest of Mariupol in time for Victory Day celebrations on 9 May.• The Ukrainian government has said that it has destroyed another Russian ship. The ministry of defence claimed that Ukrainian Bayraktar TB2 had hit the landing craft of the Serna project, tweeting: “The traditional parade of the Russian Black Sea fleet on May 9 this year will be held near Snake Island – at the bottom of the sea.”• Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said more than 300 civilians have been rescued from the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, where they had been stuck for 72 days during a bitter battle for the city. Zelenskyy said they were now preparing for a “second stage of evacuation” to rescue doctors and soldiers still trapped there. The Ukrainian government have urged Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to help with the evacuation.• Zelenskyy also expressed regret at the cultural devastation caused by the war. In his nightly address on Telegram, he said “nearly 200 cultural heritage sites” in Ukraine had been lost or damaged.• CIA Director William Burns said the war is in a dangerous phase because President Putin “thinks he cannot afford to lose”. Burns said the huge amount of western military support for Ukraine was not a deterrent to the Russian President.• Britain has pledged to provide another £1.3bn (\$1.60bn) in military support and aid to Ukraine. The new funds will almost double Britain’s previous spending commitments to Ukraine. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement, “Putin’s brutal attack is not only causing untold devastation in Ukraine – it is also threatening peace and security across Europe.”• The Group of Seven (G7) leaders will hold a video call on Sunday with Zelenskyy in a show of unity the day before Russia marks its Victory Day holiday, the White House said. Talks

	<p>will focus on the latest developments in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, efforts to bolster the country and ways to demonstrate “continued G7 unity in our collective response, including by imposing severe costs for Putin’s war”, a spokesperson for the White House said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflict in Ukraine is taking a “heavy toll” on some of Russia’s most capable units, the UK’s ministry of defence said in its latest intelligence report. At least one T-90M, Russia’s most advanced tank, had been destroyed in fighting, the ministry added. “It will take considerable time and expense for Russia to reconstitute its armed forces following this conflict,” the report said. • The UN security council has issued its first statement on the war in Ukraine, but withheld from using the words “war”, “conflict” or “invasion”. The statement instead “expresses deep concern regarding the maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine” and voiced “strong support” for the secretary general, António Guterres, in seeking a peaceful solution to the “dispute”. • The World Health Organisation indicated it is gathering evidence for potential war crimes committed by Russia. The WHO emergencies director, Mike Ryan, said the agency has already documented 200 attacks on hospitals and clinics in Ukraine which could violate international law. • Nearly 4 million Russians left the country in the first three months of this year, official statistics published by Russia’s federal security service show. Arrivals to former Soviet countries saw a significant spike after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. It is unclear how many have since returned to their home country.
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HEADLINE	05/08 Detailed ‘open source’ news investigations
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-technology-business-europe-forensics-d1093d4ea4e98a3ae21850196847c6e1
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — One of the more striking pieces of journalism from the Ukraine war featured intercepted radio transmissions from Russian soldiers indicating an invasion in disarray, their conversations even interrupted by a hacker literally whistling “Dixie.”</p> <p>It was the work of an investigations unit at The New York Times that specializes in open-source reporting, using publicly available material like satellite images, mobile phone or security camera recordings, geolocation and other internet tools to tell stories.</p> <p>The field is in its infancy but rapidly catching on. The Washington Post announced last month it was adding six people to its video forensics team, doubling its size. The University of California at Berkeley last fall became the first college to offer an investigative reporting class that focuses specifically on these techniques.</p> <p>Two video reports from open-source teams — The Times’ “Day of Rage” reconstruction of the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot and the Post’s look at how a 2020 racial protest in Washington’s Lafayette Square was cleared out — won duPont-Columbia awards for excellence in digital and broadcast journalism.</p> <p>The Ukraine radio transmissions, where soldiers complained about a lack of supplies and faulty equipment, were verified and brought to life with video and eyewitness reports from the town where they were operating.</p> <p>At one point, what appears to be a Ukrainian interloper breaks in.</p> <p>“Go home,” he advised in Russian. “It’s better to be a deserter than fertilizer.”</p> <p>The Times’ visual investigations unit, begun in 2017 and now numbering 17 staff members, “is absolutely one of the most exciting areas of growth that we have,” said Joe Kahn, incoming executive editor.</p> <p>The work is meticulous. “Day of Rage” is composed mostly of video shot by protesters themselves, in the heady days before they realized posting them online could get them into trouble, along with material from law enforcement and journalists. It outlines specifically how the attack began, who the ringleaders were and how people were killed.</p>

Video sleuthing also contradicted an initial Pentagon story about an [American drone strike](#) that killed civilians in Afghanistan last year. “Looking to us for protection, they instead became some of the last victims in America’s longest war,” the report said.

“There’s just this overwhelming amount of evidence out there on the open web that if you know how to turn over the rocks and uncover that information, you can connect the dots between all these factoids to arrive at the indisputable truth around an event,” said Malachy Browne, who leads the Times’ team.

“Day of Rage” has been [viewed nearly 7.3 million times on YouTube](#). A Post probe into the deaths at a 2021 [Travis Scott concert](#) in Houston has been seen more than 2 million times, and its story on [George Floyd’s last moments](#) logged nearly 6.5 million views.

The Post team is an outgrowth of efforts begun in 2019 to verify the authenticity of potentially newsworthy video. There are many ways to smoke out fakes, including examining shadows to determine if the apparent time of day in the video corresponds to when the activity supposedly captured actually took place.

“The Post has seen the kind of impact that this kind of storytelling can have,” said Nadine Ajaka, leader of its visual forensics team. “It’s another tool in our reporting mechanisms. It’s really nice because it’s transparent. It allows readers to understand what we know and what we don’t know, by plainly showing it.”

Still new, the open-source storytelling isn’t bound by rules that govern story length or form. A video can last a few minutes or, in the case of “Day of Rage,” 40 minutes. Work can stand alone or be embedded in text stories. They can be investigations or experiences; The Times used security and cell-phone video, along with interviews, to tell the story of [one Ukraine apartment house](#) as Russians invaded.

Leaders in the field cite the work of the website Storyful, which calls itself a social media intelligence agency, and Bellingcat as pioneers. Bellingcat, an investigative news website, and its leader, Eliot Higgins, are best known for covering the Syrian civil war and investigating alleged Russian involvement in shooting down a Malaysian Airlines flight over Ukraine in 2014.

The Arab Spring in the early 2010s was another key moment. Many of the protests were coordinated in a digital space and journalists who could navigate this had access to a world of information, said Alexa Koenig, executive director of the Human Rights Center at the University of California at Berkeley’s law school.

The commercial availability of satellite images was a landmark, too. The Times used satellite images to quickly disprove Russian claims that atrocities committed in Ukraine had been staged.

Other technology, including artificial intelligence, is helping journalists who seek information about how something happened when they couldn’t be on the scene. The Times, in 2018, worked with a London company to [artificially reconstruct a building](#) in Syria that helped contradict official denials about the use of chemical weapons.

Similarly, The Associated Press constructed a 3D model of a theater in Mariupol bombed by the Russians and, combining it with video and interviews with survivors, produced an [investigative report](#) that concluded more people died there than was previously believed.

AP has also worked with Koenig’s team on an [investigation into terror tactics](#) by Myanmar’s military rulership, and used modeling for an examination on the [toll of war](#) in a neighborhood in Gaza. It is collaborating with PBS’ Frontline to gather [evidence of war crimes](#) in Ukraine and is further looking to expand its digital efforts. Experts cite BBC’s [“Africa Eye”](#) as another notable effort in the field.

	<p>As efforts expand, Koenig said journalists need to make sure their stories drive the tools that are used, instead of the other way around. She hears regularly now from news organizations looking to build their own investigate units and need her advice — or students. Berkeley grad Haley Willis is on Browne’s team at The Times.</p> <p>It feels, Koenig said, like a major shift has happened in the past year.</p> <p>Browne said the goal of his unit’s reporting is to create stories with impact that touch upon broader truths. A probe about a Palestinian medic shot by an Israeli soldier on the Gaza strip was as much about the conflict in general than her death, for example.</p> <p>“We have similar mandates,” the Post’s Ajaka said, “which is to help make sense of some of the most urgent news of the day.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 St Louis boost Afghan refugee population
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-europe-st-louis-kabul-f59eae720c7529620faeb378a6cde09
GIST	<p>ST. LOUIS (AP) — Inamullah Niazai sits on the front porch step of his red-brick St. Louis home and smiles at the bustle of activity around him — his mother and father chatting in the front yard, his two young daughters munching chocolate ice cream bars.</p> <p>“Anything is possible here,” Niazai, 23, said. “We are so lucky that my family can be here, together.”</p> <p>An aggressive effort in St. Louis is trying to lure Afghan refugees like Niazai. About 600 have arrived so far and another 750 are expected later this year.</p> <p>Civic leaders are hopeful that over the next few years, thousands more will decide to relocate to the Midwestern city, helping to offset seven decades of population loss and rejuvenate urban neighborhoods — just as the arrival of Bosnian refugees did three decades ago.</p> <p>It’s been nearly nine months since the Afghan capital of Kabul was ceded to the Taliban. Since last summer, more than 76,000 Afghan refugees have relocated to the U.S. While California and Texas have taken in most of the displaced Afghans, many will eventually go elsewhere.</p> <p>In the 1990s, St. Louis became America’s most popular landing spot for Bosnians displaced by war in the former Yugoslavia. Among the estimated 300,000 who fled to the U.S., some 40,000 now call St. Louis and the region home.</p> <p>They revitalized an area of the city’s south side that is now often referred to as Little Bosnia. The area features Bosnian-owned markets, coffee shops, auto repair shops and other businesses. They have their own online newspaper, their own chamber of commerce.</p> <p>The Bosnians also provided a badly needed population boost in a city that’s been losing people at an alarming rate, dropping from a peak of over 850,000 in 1950 to just under 300,000 today.</p> <p>St. Louis’ Afghan Resettlement Initiative is backed by over \$1 million in donations and more than 800 volunteers, and it has support from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis, the International Institute of St. Louis and other nonprofit groups. Advocates say they’ve received no opposition to their efforts.</p> <p>Jerry Schlichter, an attorney who is the organizer and a major funder, said the initiative helps find housing and jobs, connects new arrivals to training such as classes on computer coding, and provides grants for business startups.</p>

The St. Louis effort also provided money to establish an online Afghan newspaper, a chamber of commerce and a community center.

“There’s a mutual need. We have been stagnant,” Schlichter said. “With this one-time opportunity with Afghan refugees ending up somewhere in this country, we should take advantage of it.”

Arrey Obenson, president and CEO of the International Institute of St. Louis, said he’s confident that the new refugees will revitalize neighborhoods, just as the Bosnians did.

“The reality of the circumstance we face is that if we look at St. Louis city and the rate the population is declining, we have to find a way to bring people into the community to turn that around,” Obenson said.

St. Louis isn’t the only city with a declining population trying to attract Afghan refugees.

Detroit also reached its population apex in 1950, when 1.85 million people lived there. Today, the population has dropped by two-thirds, to about 640,000.

Detroit corporate and community leaders in April launched the Detroit Refugee Network, with hopes of raising more than \$1 million to provide services such as housing, education, transportation and language training. About 250 Afghan refugees have settled in Detroit, with another 400 or so elsewhere in southeastern Michigan.

Like St. Louis, history in Detroit has proven the value immigrants can bring, said Steve Tobocman, executive director of Global Detroit.

Tobocman and Alan Mallach, a senior fellow with the Center for Community Progress, studied two Detroit neighborhoods filled with immigrants from Bangladesh, Yemen, Mexico, and Central and South America. Those two neighborhoods have grown by nearly 50% in the past two decades or so.

The result is less crime, well over 100 new businesses and reductions in home vacancies and tax foreclosures, the study found. Residents surveyed were more satisfied and optimistic than Detroit residents as a whole.

“Depopulation is what really cycles these neighborhoods into some pretty dire circumstances,” Tobocman said. “The vacancy, the lack of retail opportunity, the lack of jobs. Just stabilizing the population or in a couple of cases regrowing the population can reverse that course.”

A major hurdle for Afghan refugees is housing. Across the country, thousands still live in hotels.

But by early May, only two Afghan families were still in St. Louis hotels because the initiative has a program guaranteeing payment to landlords, Schlichter and Obenson said.

Niazai, his wife and their two young daughters fled Kabul last year. They were sent first to Washington, D.C., then to temporary housing in Texas. They chose to end up in St. Louis because other relatives were already here.

The initiative helped find them a place to rent — a brick home on a quiet street a few miles south of the Gateway Arch that now is home to 11 family members. Volunteers provided furniture, food and what Niazai called “welcome money.” Someone even gave him a car.

Niazai said he feels at home in St. Louis.

“We will stay,” he said. “My future is good here.”

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SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/olympic-peninsula-humane-society-seeing-dramatic-increase-in-dog-surrenders
GIST	<p>CLALLAM COUNTY, Wash. - The Olympic Peninsula Humane Society is experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of dogs surrendered back to the shelter, according to MyClallamCounty.com.</p> <p>Within the last five weeks the shelter says they have seen a rise in the number of owner-surrender dog applications, and officials attribute the problem to the pandemic, according to MyClallamCounty.com.</p> <p>According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), more than 23 million American households-- nearly one and five nationwide-- adopted a pet during the pandemic.</p> <p>In mid-2021, reports surfaced that some areas in the country saw a surge in pets returned to shelters who were adopted in the pandemic. As the pandemic died down, people started going back to the office and traveling again, which in some cases meant the change in routine made them realize they weren't as prepared for the commitment of having a pet as they thought.</p> <p>However, the direct cause of the recent rise in owner-surrender applications is unclear.</p> <p>Olympic Peninsula Humane Society says they have reached the point where they are unable to accept any new animals.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Shortage critical drug, rationing CT scans
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article261124367.html
GIST	<p>Some hospitals in Washington are rationing medical scans and rethinking procedures after a shortage of a critical drug has struck the western United States.</p> <p>Iodine-based contrast, a drug used in computerized tomography (CT) scans, is in short supply, according to health care organizations in Western Washington.</p> <p>CT scans, which combine multiple X-ray images into a 3D-like image, are used to diagnose and track the health of bones, blood vessels and soft tissues. They are used to assess internal injuries, diagnose cancer and plan medical procedures.</p> <p>“CT is the workhorse for care delivery,” said University of Washington School of Medicine professor and radiology chair Dr. Dushyant Sahani. “All important decisions require that.”</p> <p>UWMC performs about 1,000 CT scans a week, he said. The majority use the contrast in short supply.</p> <p>The contrast shortage comes from production shutdowns at Shanghai, China-based factories operated by pharmaceutical company GE Healthcare. The plants were temporarily closed due to COVID-19 lockdowns ordered by the Chinese government. While the plants are reportedly at full production again, the shutdown has resulted in a shortage that could affect hospitals into July.</p> <p>Providence Swedish system, which includes Olympia’s Providence Saint Peter Hospital, said its stores of contrast are at “critical” levels. GE provides approximately 97 percent of its iodine-based contrast.</p> <p>WHY CONTRAST IS CRUCIAL</p> <p>About 60 percent of CT scans use a contrast agent which is used to differentiate between organs and detect lesions. The same iodine contrast is used in other procedures such as angiograms. It’s usually administered intravenously.</p> <p>The shortage seems to have caught medical institutions off guard. UW learned of the shortage on Friday. Providence Swedish notified its staff of the shortage on Wednesday.</p>

GE controls the majority of the contrast market in the U.S. Hospitals that contract for a drug generally only use one supplier. That can be a problem if the supplier comes up short with a particular drug.

Virginia Mason Franciscan Healthcare (VMFH), the parent of Tacoma's Saint Joseph Medical Center, said it was aware of the shortage but wasn't impacted.

"We are maintaining adequate supply through our manufacturer, Bracco, to meet our patients' needs," VMFH said in a statement Thursday.

Medical imaging specialist TRA also uses Bracco as its contrast supplier and is not expecting a shortage, according to spokesperson Chris Coates. In addition to its own facilities, TRA manages imaging for the Carol Milgard Breast Center in Tacoma.

MultiCare Health System did not provide the status of its contrast supplies.

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In the six days since the shortage became known, Sahani and his colleagues have been strategizing to reduce the need for contrast and avoid a crisis.

"How do we save enough contrast media (for) mission critical services and patients who deserve most of that?" Sahani said. "We can prioritize those and change our policy around those patients who don't need as much."

Cardiac and emergency department patients are being prioritized over patients who might need a CT scan for a routine cancer check-up, he said.

UWMC is also using more dual energy CT scans, a state of the art technology that uses less contrast without compromising image quality, Sahani said.

PROVIDENCE SWEDISH

Providence Swedish assessed that its current supplies will last just one week at normal use.

"We have begun shifting resources between hospitals as need arises," the health-care system said in a statement. "Our supply chain management division is working tirelessly to acquire additional contrast for our hospitals."

On Wednesday, Providence Swedish put a temporary hold on all non-emergency outpatient CT contrast scans.

The hold is needed to preserve contrast for strokes, trauma, cancer diagnosis as well as cardiac and lung conditions. However, patients should not hesitate to seek medical care due to the shortage, Providence Swedish said.

"We are asking our community to please do not delay or postpone urgent or emergent care," it said.

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HEADLINE	05/06 'Freedom' convoys as lifestyle than protest
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3na34/freedom-convoy-lifestyle-trucker-g-hagerstown
GIST	<p>The bride's father couldn't be there, so Trucker G gave her away.</p> <p>A group of four people stood proudly upon a flatbed truck at the Hagerstown Speedway parking lot in Maryland, as a man in a safety vest led the couple in their vows. Trucker G, a popular livestreamer with the "People's Convoy" who posted the ceremony to his YouTube, stood behind the bride in sunglasses and a camo-print sweatshirt. After the officiant declared the two husband and wife, they kissed in front of the crowd, raucous with approval for two of their own getting hitched.</p>

“Thank you, everyone, for being here. It means a lot,” the bride said. “Thank you, Trucker G, for standing in for my dad.”

Shortly after the wedding in March, many of the participants in the ceremony marched off to their big rigs and, once again, began to drive around the Washington, D.C., Capital Beltway in their quest to get the emergency declaration tied to COVID lifted. That’s been their goal since they left California in late February. The group was inspired by the Ottawa trucker convoy, which took over several blocks in downtown Ottawa for weeks before a massive police operation finally removed them.

Both convoys evolved from the anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown movement (which itself grew from the anti-government movement) that experienced immense growth during the pandemic. Along the way, they’ve raised millions of dollars for their dedicated members, who’ve left their homes and jobs to live on the road and fight for what they see as fundamental freedoms.

But as the COVID-19 pandemic wanes—or at least the health measures instituted to protect the population do—the protest movement that grew in opposition to them is still going strong. While many truckers initially came for the “action,” it’s the community, like the wedding and friendships forged along the way, that’s keeping them there. It’s not just about being in the convoy, encampments, or rallies; it’s also about helping out in the kitchen in the lot where the truckers parked for the night and joining new friends around an evening fire where you can talk shop about your favorite conspiracies.

“It’s quite the environment down here. It’s awesome, man,” said former convoy leader Brian Brase in a March livestream. “Everyone in the convoy, they’re rock stars here.”

“There is a lot of community that is happening. The bonds that are being made here, I haven’t seen anything like it in my life.”

Those tight bonds impact the movement’s staying power, according to Amarnath Amarasingam, an extremism and radicalization expert at Queens University. As he puts it: “It’s always been about community. It’s always been about interpersonal relations.”

“Once that mobilization happens, once that worldview is increasingly solidified, [the community] is easily mobilized again for another set of issues that might come down the road,” Amarasingam told VICE News. “This is why, even as the convoy left, there is still the long-term question.”

Like with any fringe community, an entire ecosystem has developed within the convoy. There are micro-celebrities (Trucker G, for example), friendships, and feuds that occur. In Hagerstown, the convoy was nearly torn apart by a DJ named Ricky Bobby who lent his sound gear to the organizers.

They also have their fans. One woman excitedly met them at a parking lot in Idaho last weekend to offer haircuts as the convoy passed through. She said she’d driven all the way to Maryland when the convoy was there and got to do one loop of the Beltway, which was “fantastic,” and she couldn’t wait to see them again. As she trimmed the hair of the convoy’s mechanic in front of an RV, her friend filming raved about how happy they were to be back with the truckers.

“It’s just so amazing to be around people who believe what you believe,” she said. “When I went to beauty school years ago, they taught me not to talk about politics and religion. I’ve been following this stuff ever since before Trump won, because I knew something was up. I just knew it, and I can’t talk to my clients about it.”

The group condemned the media’s treatment of Trump and talked about how no one realized he was “still the president” as she styled the mechanic’s shock of white hair. Another streamer (seemingly everyone involved is a streamer) wandered in and eagerly joined the conversation.

Despite the chatter about beliefs, the truckers aren't necessarily tied to one hard-line topic or goal. COVID and the health measures around it are but a symptom of a broader problem they're worried about—essentially that a cabal of elites are using COVID to gain more power and eventually sell off their country to globalists.

So if the pandemic disappears tomorrow, the community might just find a new cause. The American convoy, for example, left the Hagerstown Speedway in Maryland in early April for California to protest some bills they opposed, including ones that touch upon vaccinations and abortions.

"The convoy protest for some may have never been about the COVID mandates, but for the organizers it's a continuation of their history as anti-government extremists. Many have used similar tactics over the years to lesser success," said Marc-Andre Argentino, an extremism researcher at Concordia University and fellow at the Global Network on Extremism and Technology.

Protests have been going on since the start of the pandemic and many of the organizers are the same people who organized previous rallies like the Yellow Vest Movement, a anti-government movement in Canada whose high point occurred just prior to the pandemic.

This past weekend in Ottawa, many of the protesters who cut their teeth by camping out two months ago returned to Canada's capital for the first time since they were chased out by police. They've since rebranded as the "Rolling Thunder," and they rode in on motorcycles this time instead of driving trucks.

For some, the reunion was an emotional experience. Some cried upon seeing each other, and others ran to hug their friends, the Toronto Star reported. A popular livestreamer ran into old friends almost immediately upon entering the protest grounds. "In case you didn't know, we shared a paddy wagon together," he excitedly told his audience about the man he just ran into.

"The bonds formed during these kinds of heightened moments of adrenaline last a long time, and they're quite intense. The protest movements become massively important for interpersonal bonds," said Amarasingam. "I remember during the Tamil protests people would meet and get married, you know, actual relationships formed. People referred to each other as 'my protest mom' and 'my protest dad.'"

Comparisons can be drawn to previous populist movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party Movement in the United States. Although Occupy petered out, the Tea Party has entrenched itself in the halls of power. Amarasingam said leadership will determine the convoys' direction, but what's certain is they're not going away anytime soon.

Many of the people active in these communities have done so at quite a personal cost: alienation from their families and friends, losing work because they refused to get vaccinated, or emptying their retirement savings into a GoFundMe for the truckers. They're bound to be fully invested after paying a price.

The protesters may get sick of convoying and move to a new form of protest, especially after the success of the Ottawa action cools, but the faces yelling the slogans will remain the same.

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HEADLINE	05/07 More US wealthy buy 'golden passports'
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/record-number-wealthy-americans-buying-113000971.html
GIST	<p>The number of wealthy Americans applying for citizenship or residency in foreign countries has skyrocketed over the past three years as US billionaires, tech entrepreneurs, and celebrities look to create a "plan B" for their families, multiple investment migration firms told Insider.</p> <p>More than a dozen countries offer so-called "golden passports" and visas that allow affluent foreigners to receive citizenship or residency in exchange for investing in the country. The most expensive programs range from \$1.1 million in Malta to \$9.5 million in Austria, according to Forbes.</p>

"We see these programs as an insurance policy," Ezzedeem Soleiman, a managing partner at Latitude Residency & Citizenship, said. "We've had some billionaires approach us and ask what's the best place to live if there's a climate catastrophe, or if there's another storm, or another global pandemic."

Latitude, a company which guides high-net-worth investors around the world through the application process, said US inquiries have increased 300% between 2019 and 2021. Henley & Partners, one of the world's largest citizenship brokers, said sales to American nationals increased by 327% between 2019 and 2020 and an additional 10% in 2021.

According to Dominic Volek, head of private clients at Henley & Partners, there are "four C's" currently driving the investor citizenship industry: COVID-19, climate change, cryptocurrency, and conflict.

The recent uptick in American applicants started during the Trump administration and escalated during pandemic lockdowns, he added.

"In the very strict lockdowns there was a point where if you only had an American passport, you could not enter Europe," Volek told Insider. "I think that made a lot of particularly ultra high net worth individuals realize that they're potentially a little bit more fragile than they thought."

Reaz Jafri, CEO of Dasein Advisors, said he has received more American inquiries over the past three years than the previous 20 years combined. He said his US clients often work in tech, real estate, or crypto, and are worth between \$50 million and \$20 billion.

The one thing they all have in common: deep-rooted fear about the future of American society, he said.

From a tech founder concerned about the rise in Asian-American hate crimes to young web3 entrepreneurs looking to avoid tax hikes, Jafri said wealthy clients across the political spectrum are planning for the worst.

"We've all lived through the past two and a half years," Jafri said. "It all just reminded us how vulnerable and frail we are, and people who have means are accepting that it will happen again — and they don't want to be caught off guard."

'Portugal is the next California'

Two of the firms interviewed by Insider said Portugal's five-year residence permit — which allows visa-free travel to 26 countries in the European Union — is the most in-demand program among American investors.

Portugal's "golden visa" requires a minimum investment of slightly over \$200,000 and an average stay of seven days a year in Portugal. When the permit expires, residents can then apply for full-time citizenship, which can take an additional three years.

"Portugal is the next California," Soleiman said. "You have tremendous talent going there, tremendous wealth going there."

Ultra-rich Americans want to plant roots in Europe as a "legacy plan" for their children and grandchildren, he added. "A lot of them are either disappointed in what's happening in the US or are not seeing the opportunities that they once saw in the US."

However, many golden passport recipients do not end up moving and some rarely visit at all, as a Guardian investigation into Malta's citizenship program revealed last year.

"Very few of our clients actually move," Volek of Henley & Partners said. "Most of our clients just want the option available."

	<p>The spike in Americans seeking golden passports comes amid fears that the programs have created loopholes for "shady individuals" and "dirty money" to enter the EU.</p> <p>Peter Spiro, a professor of international law at Temple University and expert in dual-citizenship, told Insider that major companies like Henley & Partners have a "serious interest" in vetting their applicants.</p> <p>"They are making a lot of money off it and they want to keep making a lot of money off it," he said. "So they have an incentive in the due diligence element being real. My sense is that it's they've done a pretty good job."</p> <p>Volek told Insider that due to the industry's lack of regulation, there are some smaller investor migration firms that do not properly vet applicants.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Grave miscalculation: Ukraine collaboration
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/russias-grave-miscalculation-ukrainians-collaborate-154623413.html
GIST	<p>KRYVYI RIH, Ukraine — The solicitation to commit treason came to Oleksandr Vilkul on the second day of the war, in a phone call from an old colleague.</p> <p>Vilkul, the scion of a powerful political family in southeastern Ukraine that was long seen as harboring pro-Russian views, took the call as Russian troops were advancing to within a few miles of his hometown, Kryvyi Rih.</p> <p>“He said, ‘Oleksandr Yurivich, you are looking at the map, you see the situation is predetermined,’” Vilkul said, recalling the conversation with a fellow minister in a former, pro-Russian Ukrainian government.</p> <p>“Sign an agreement of friendship, cooperation and defense with Russia and they will have good relations with you,” the former colleague said. “You will be a big person in the new Ukraine.”</p> <p>The offer failed spectacularly. Once war had begun, Vilkul said, the gray area seeped out of Ukrainian politics for him. Missiles striking his hometown made the choice obvious: He would fight back.</p> <p>“I responded with profanity,” Vilkul said.</p> <p>If the first months of the war in Ukraine became a military debacle for the Russian army — deflating the reputations of its commanders and troops in a forced retreat from Kyiv — the Russian invasion also highlighted another glaring failure: Moscow’s flawed analysis of the politics of the country it was attacking. The miscalculation led to mistakes no less costly in lives for the Russian army than the faulty tactics of tank operators who steered into bogs.</p> <p>The Kremlin entered the war expecting a quick and painless victory, predicting that the government of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would fracture and that leading officials in the largely Russian-speaking eastern region would gladly switch sides. That has not happened.</p> <p>The political myopia was most significant in the country’s east, political analysts say.</p> <p>In all but a tiny number of villages, Russia failed to flip local politicians to its side. Ukrainian authorities have opened 38 cases of treason, all targeting low-level officials in individual instances of betrayal.</p> <p>“Nobody wanted to be part of that thing behind the wall,” said Kostyantyn Usov, a former member of Parliament from Kryvyi Rih, referring to Russia’s isolated, authoritarian system.</p> <p>He said that system had dismal appeal in Ukraine and noted the absence of widespread collaboration with Russia, including among Ukrainians who speak Russian and share the country’s cultural values.</p>

“We are part of something bright,” he said of Ukraine. “It is here, with us, in our group. And they have nothing to offer.”

Other prominent, once Russian-leaning politicians including Ihor Terekhov, the mayor of Kharkiv, and Hennady Trukhanov, the mayor of Odesa, also remained loyal and became fierce defenders of their cities.

Along with leaders in the southeast, Ukrainian people also resisted. Street protests against occupation in Kherson continue despite lethal dangers for participants. One man stood in front of a tank. Kryvyi Rih’s miners and steelworkers have shown no signs of pivoting allegiance to Russia.

“Before the war, we had ties to Russia,” said Serhiy Zhyhalov, 36, a steel mill engineer, referring to familial, linguistic and cultural bonds. But no longer, he said. “No one has any doubts that Russia attacked us.”

Ukraine’s southeastern regions, an expanse of steppe and blighted industrial and mining cities, is now the focus of fighting in the war.

Driving south from Kyiv, the highway leaves behind the dense pine forests and reedy swamps of northern Ukraine, and the landscape opens into expansive plains. Farm fields stretch out to the horizons, in brilliant, yellow blossoming rapeseed or tilled black earth.

In many ways, the region is entwined with Soviet and Russian history. The iron and coal industries shaped southeastern Ukraine. In and around the city of Kryvyi Rih are iron ore deposits; the coal is farther east, near the city of Donetsk.

The two mineral basins, known as the Kryvbas and the Donbas, gave birth to a metallurgical industry that drew in many nationalities from around the Czarist and Soviet empires from the late 19th century onward, with Russian becoming the lingua franca in the mining towns. Villages remained mostly Ukrainian-speaking.

The region for years elected Russian-leaning politicians such as Vilkul, a favorite villain to Ukrainian nationalists for promoting Soviet-style cultural events that angered many Ukrainians. He staged, for example, a singalong party in Kryvyi Rih to belt out “Katyusha,” a Russian song associated with the Soviet World War II victory.

More substantively, Vilkul ascended in politics under the former, pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, in whose government he served as deputy prime minister until street protesters deposed Yanukovych in 2014.

Much of the rest of Yanukovych’s Cabinet fled with him to Russia. But Vilkul remained in Ukraine as a de facto political boss of Kryvyi Rih while his aging father served as the city’s mayor.

And he caught Moscow’s eye. In 2018, Vilkul said, he was told through an intermediary that “the time of chaos is over” and that he should now follow orders from Moscow if he wished to remain in politics in the southeast. He said he refused.

The Russians, he said, had not even bothered to court him, they only leveled demands. He said Moscow took the same approach to other politicians in Ukraine’s east. “They didn’t even try to convince us,” he said. “They just thought we would be, a priori, on their side.”

On the eve of the war, Vilkul was most likely the Russian-leaning politician in Ukraine with the broadest popular support. “I was alone on this level,” he said. He was also viewed by Moscow as a promising potential convert to its side when it invaded Ukraine.

That's when the call came to Vilkul's cellphone from Vitaly Zakharchenko, a Ukrainian in exile in Russia who had served as interior minister under Vilkul in Yanukovich's government. He recommended Vilkul cooperate with the Russians.

"I told him to get lost," Vilkul said. "I didn't even consider it."

Vilkul said he had been misunderstood — by Russia's leadership and his nationalist opposition at home. A great-grandfather, he said, had fought White Russians in the civil war. The Vilkul family, he said, "has been fighting Russians on this land for a hundred years."

The Kremlin, he said, had misinterpreted his respect for World War II veterans and support for rights of Russian speakers as potential support for a renewed Russian empire, something he said was a mistake. He called the Russians "classic megalomaniacs."

"They mistook common language and values like attitudes to the Second World War and Orthodoxy as a sign that somebody loves them," he said.

A second offer, this time presented publicly by another Ukrainian exile, Oleh Tsaryov, in a post on Telegram, came about a week later, when Russian troops had advanced to within 6 miles of the city. "My fellow party members and I have always taken a pro-Russian stance," the post said, referring to Vilkul and his father, and added ominously that "cooperation with the Russian army means preserving the city and lives."

Vilkul responded with an obscene post on Facebook.

On the first days of the invasion, Vilkul ordered the region's mining companies to park heavy equipment on the runway of the city's airport, thwarting an airborne assault, and on approach roads, slowing tank columns. The tires were then popped and engines disabled.

The city's steel industry began to turn out tank barriers and plates for armored vests. Zelenskyy, whose hometown is Kryvyi Rih, appointed Vilkul military governor of the city on the third day of the war, though the two had been political opponents in peacetime.

Vilkul has taken to wearing fatigues and a camouflage bandanna. A parade of Ukrainian nationalists, including the leader of the Right Sector paramilitary, Dmytro Yarosh, and a prominent activist and military officer, Tetiana Chernovol, once sworn enemies of the Vilkul family, have shown up in his office to shake his hand.

"If we fight the Russians," he said, "were we ever really pro-Russian, in essence?"

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HEADLINE	05/07 CDC probes Covid outbreak on cruise ship
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/07/us/carnival-cruise-ship-covid-outbreak-cdc/index.html
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is investigating a recent Covid-19 outbreak on a Carnival cruise ship that docked in Seattle after a two-week voyage.</p> <p>The Carnival Spirit, which sailed through the Panama Canal, departed Miami on April 17 and arrived in Seattle on May 3, according to a statement from the cruise line. The ship holds 2,124 guests and 930 crew members, Carnival said.</p> <p>The CDC says it's not permitted to publicly share the number of passengers and crew members who quarantined or tested positive. But the ship is labeled as orange status per the agency's cruise ship Covid-19 threshold, indicating that 0.3% or more of total passengers and or crew members tested positive, according to CDC's guidelines.</p>

The ship's color status helps the CDC determine the scope of investigation, the agency said.

Carnival Spirit is one of 62 cruise ships currently sailing at orange status, the CDC said in a statement to CNN.

Both the cruise line and CDC said there were no severe outcomes or serious health issues among those who tested positive, and Carnival said most guests were asymptomatic.

"Our health and safety protocols exceed CDC guidelines and were closely followed including vaccination requirements and pre-cruise testing of all guests. Our crew are also vaccinated and wear masks," Carnival said in a statement to CNN.

"Our protocols are designed to flex up as needed and additional measures were implemented during the voyage," the statement added. "In addition, all guests who were scheduled to continue on with the ship's next cruise to Alaska were tested and any guests and their traveling companions who tested positive were disembarked."

The ship departed Seattle for Alaska later on May 3, according to Carnival's statement.

The CDC is working with the cruise line as well as state and local health agencies to "enact existing Covid-19 agreements and protocols," the statement added.

Passengers say cruise ship was "overwhelmed"

Some passengers who were on board the Carnival Spirit alleged that crew members mishandled the Covid-19 outbreak on the ship.

Darren Siefertson, who is from Las Vegas, Nevada, told CNN he boarded the ship on April 17 from Miami and was informed by April 26 that there was a Covid-19 outbreak on the ship.

After testing positive, Siefertson said he was promised to be moved to an isolation cabin but ended up being forced to stay in the same room as his roommate.

Siefertson said when he called the medical center for an update, the center had already closed before its scheduled closing time, and no one was picking up the phone.

When Siefertson's cabin mate went to guest services to ask what they should do, he was told there were no more isolation cabins available, and he would have to stay in the same room as Siefertson.

Ship guests also complained that room service took "hours to get food to those who were in quarantine," Siefertson said.

"There were times we ordered our food at 1 p.m. and it didn't show up until 7 p.m.," Walter Babij, who was on the cruise with his wife, told CNN. Both Babij and his wife tested positive for Covid-19 while aboard the ship and quarantined in an isolation cabin.

"There were also a few times we didn't get our complete orders. We would have to call several times to track down our food. We were completely dependent on them," Babij said.

Siefertson also complained that a few days after testing positive, his cabin and two other cabins near him began to reek of sewage.

"You couldn't even call to ask someone to fix the problem because no one would pick up the phone and we couldn't leave our room, so I had to stay in this room that smelled like a toilet. It was terrible," Siefertson said. "Carnival said they managed the situation, but that is so not true. They were so overwhelmed."

	Both Siefertson and Babij told CNN they felt the cruise line was “overwhelmed.”
	“I don’t think they expected that level of cases and when it got to a certain level they didn’t know what to do. It was a perfect storm,” Babij said.
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HEADLINE	05/06 Cuba: 5-star hotel gas leak explosion
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/06/cuba-explosion-hotel-saratoga-havana/
GIST	<p>An explosion at a historical five-star hotel in Old Havana on Friday morning killed at least 26 people and destroyed much of the building, Cuban officials said.</p> <p>Dozens more were injured in the blast that rocked the Hotel Saratoga, across from the Cuban Capitol, around 11 a.m. Friday. On Saturday, officials released the names and ages of the dead; they included a pregnant woman and four children aged 10 to 17.</p> <p>Are you on Telegram? Subscribe to our channel for the latest updates on Russia's war in Ukraine. The cause of the explosion was unclear, officials said, but preliminary investigation pointed to a gas leak.</p> <p>“It wasn’t a bomb or an attack,” President Miguel Díaz-Canel said. “It’s an unfortunate accident.”</p> <p>The hotel was preparing to reopen on Tuesday after closing two years ago during the coronavirus pandemic, it said in an April 28 Facebook post, the most recent on its page. Havana Gov. Reinaldo García Zapata said the hotel was undergoing repairs and there were no tourists inside, according to the Communist Party newspaper Granma.</p> <p>Videos and images on social media showed the facade of the hotel blasted away, smoke filling the air and crowds gathering in the street outside. A photo published by the news agency Reuters showed at least one body in the street outside the hotel covered with a sheet.</p> <p>“The explosion knocked me from my chair,” said Lester Fernández, 25, who lives less than a five-minute walk from the Saratoga. “A piece of my ceiling fell. I quickly ran down the stairs and I thought it was my building that was falling,” he said, before realizing it was the hotel. “It was a complete disaster.”</p> <p>David Duque, a 30-year-old travel blogger, was about to start a photo shoot about five blocks from the Hotel Saratoga when he felt the city rumble and heard the roaring thunder of the blast.</p> <p>“We thought it was a bomb or an attack,” Duque said. “I was so nervous that my legs were shaking. I didn’t know what to do. ... In Cuba, we’ve never felt something like this.”</p> <p>He rushed to the hotel and found a scene of chaos and confusion. He saw the bloodied faces of elderly people who had been passing by the hotel or on nearby buses at the time of the blast. He saw uniformed hotel workers standing on what was left of the upper floors of the building and screaming for help. He saw children running and others helping pull people out of the rubble.</p> <p>“I felt paralyzed,” he said. “We were scared to get too close. We didn’t know what could happen next.”</p> <p>A tweet from the presidency showed an injured child in a hospital bed, a patch over one eye, as Díaz-Canel visited with patients. A school is located in front of the hotel. All of its students were evacuated safely, Cuban officials said.</p> <p>The Saratoga, which was built in the 1930s and renovated in 2005, has 96 rooms, two bars, two restaurants, a spa and a rooftop pool with panoramic view of the Cuban capital, according to its website. Guests have reportedly included Beyoncé and Madonna.</p>

The hotel explosion was the latest blow to Cuba's tourism industry, which officials say is the No. 1 source of hard currency for an island heavily dependent on imports and struggling through its worst economic crisis in three decades. After the coronavirus pandemic started, Cuba sharply limited tourism, only fully opening the country last November.

Officials at Cuba's annual tourism fair, held in recent days, said 313,900 foreigners visited in the first trimester, up from 48,000 in the same period last year — but still well below the 981,900 in 2020. They blamed the drop on the fact that many people were only beginning to make plans to travel again.

"We are recovering little by little," Maria del Carmen Orellana, Cuba's vice-minister of tourism, said in an interview last month. "We're hoping for a good summer," she said, noting reservations were up for coming months.

Still, the island's tourism sector is struggling in numerous ways. Canadians and Europeans usually account for the highest number of visitors, but as winter ends in those regions, trips to the Caribbean drop. During the pandemic, Russians had become the top group of tourists, many traveling via a special "bubble" arrangement aimed at keeping them at beach resorts and away from Cubans. But since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it's been virtually impossible for Russian flights to reach Cuba.

President Donald Trump added sanctions to the decades-old U.S. trade embargo, many aimed at travel. He banned American cruise ships from visiting Cuba, forbade airline flights to cities outside Havana, the capital, and prohibited Americans from staying at hundreds of hotels, saying they were linked to the communist government and its allies. Among them is the Saratoga, the site of Friday's blast.

Duque, the travel blogger, lives outside of Havana but goes into the city almost every day to take photos promoting its architecture. By Friday afternoon, he was still shaken by the scene at the hotel, which he described as an iconic piece of Cuban heritage.

He hoped the hotel wouldn't need to be demolished. "It would be a great loss," he said.

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HEADLINE	05/07 NKorea launches ballistic missile from sub
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/north-korea-fires-off-suspected-sub-launched-ballistic-missile-11651907523?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>SEOUL—North Korea launched a suspected submarine-launched ballistic missile off its east coast on Saturday, officials in Seoul and Tokyo said, just three days before South Korea's new president takes office.</p> <p>The missile was fired at 2:07 p.m. local time from the Sinpo area, a central coastal region that is home to a North Korean naval base. It reached an altitude of roughly 31 miles and traveled about 373 miles before falling into the waters between Korea and Japan, Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said. The missile landed outside of Japan's exclusive economic zone, he added. South Korea issued a similar assessment.</p> <p>"The series of North Korean actions, including its repeated ballistic missile launches, pose a threat to the peace and security of Japan, the region and the international community, and are absolutely unacceptable," Mr. Kishi said.</p> <p>South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff called North Korea's launches a grave threat that undermines peace on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.</p> <p>South Korea's National Security Council convened a meeting Saturday, urging North Korea to suspend missile launches that violate United Nations sanctions—and return to dialogue.</p>

	<p>North Korea has conducted more than a dozen missile tests this year, including a full-range intercontinental ballistic missile launch in March, which showed Pyongyang possesses a weapon that can reach the U.S. mainland.</p> <p>The latest test comes just days before the May 10 inauguration of Yoon Suk-yeol, a conservative who has promised a more hard-line approach toward North Korea. Pyongyang fired a ballistic missile off its east coast on Wednesday, following a military parade on April 25, during which leader Kim Jong Un vowed to ramp up development of nuclear arms.</p> <p>During the military parade, Pyongyang showcased its Hwasong-17 ICBM, multiple giant rocket launchers and a submarine-launched ballistic missile. Satellite images of Sinpo South Shipyard showed unusual activity around an experimental ballistic missile submarine since March, according to a report by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Inflation eclipses strong wage gains
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-eclipses-aprils-historically-strong-wage-gains-11651854549?mod=series_inflation
GIST	<p>Wage increases are settling at a historically high rate but aren't keeping up with inflation, which has accelerated this year.</p> <p>The result is many workers are receiving big raises—and may still be struggling to pay for more expensive gasoline, groceries and rent. Strong wage growth can exacerbate inflationary pressures if employers decide to increase prices to offset raises. However, economists said the latest readings could be a sign that such pressures are starting to ease.</p> <p>The tight labor market boosted average hourly earnings for private sector workers by 5.5% in April from the previous year, a slightly slower pace than in March, when they rose 5.6%, the Labor Department said Friday. Those gains were well below the 8.5% increase in consumer prices in March from a year earlier, according to a separate Labor Department report.</p> <p>“The wages are not keeping up,” said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton. “It leaves workers chasing a moving target on inflation and it erodes their living standards.”</p> <p>So far this year, annual wage growth has held in a range of 5.2% to 5.6% a month. That is well above the 3.4% monthly increases recorded in the six months to February 2020, right before the pandemic became widespread in the U.S. Still, broader inflation has accelerated from a 7% annual gain in December while wage growth held mostly steady. April price data will be released next week.</p> <p>Friday's report also includes signs that wage gains could be starting to cool as employers are hiring at a robust rate. Wages for all private-sector workers rose 0.3% in April from the previous month, the slowest pace in all but one of the past eight months.</p> <p>“That may be starting to suggest that the incremental pressure on wages, month to month, might be starting to ease a little bit,” said Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch Ratings.</p> <p>Employers have added an average 552,000 jobs a month for the past six months. The labor-force participation rate slipped to 62.2% in April, but is higher than it was in 2021, when it averaged 61.7%. That suggests better wages may be drawing some workers into the labor market in the past year.</p> <p>Some of the labor market's hottest sectors are showing signs of cooling pay growth, perhaps signaling broader easing of wage pressures in the coming months.</p>

	<p>Wage gains in the leisure and hospitality industry, which exceeded 13% annually in November and December, eased to 11% year-over-year in April. Transportation and warehousing industries saw wages rise 7.1% on the year to April, down from 7.7% in March.</p> <p>And in retail, wages year over year were up 4.9% in April, slowing from March's 6.1%. Retail sector wages on a monthly basis fell 0.4% in April from March.</p> <p>The fact that wage gains have stabilized while inflation has continued to accelerate should be a comforting sign for the Federal Reserve, economists said.</p> <p>It suggests that labor costs are not likely to aggravate inflation pressures in the near term, which are being largely driven by supply-chain problems and higher energy and food costs due to the war in Ukraine, Mr. Coulton said.</p> <p>"If wage growth stabilizes at these levels over the course of the summer, I think [Fed officials] will become more confident in their forecast that wage growth will slow in 2023," he said.</p> <p>Fed Chairman Jerome Powell has said the central bank's rate increases are intended to take some pressure off the labor market, which he described in March as "tight to an unhealthy level."</p> <p>The Fed raised its benchmark rate by a half-percentage point following its meeting this week and hinted that more such raises could be coming at future meetings.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Cracks in consumer spending; crossroads
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/consumers-have-spearheaded-recovery-but-data-signal-a-potential-change-11651915801?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>American consumers are at a crossroads.</p> <p>In large part, they have weathered the economic storm caused by the pandemic, saved lots of money and contributed to the continuing recovery.</p> <p>While wages have continued to grow at a strong pace and household spending rose 1.1% in March, some signals are pointing toward a potential shift in how—and how much—Americans will spend in coming months, hinting at cracks in the economy's main driver.</p> <p>Restaurants have recovered, just not everywhere The number of people dining out has returned to prepandemic levels nationally, according to data from the table-booking service OpenTable. But in markets such as New York, Chicago, Seattle and San Francisco, there is still a long way to go. And a sharp rise in menu prices isn't helping to lure diners back.</p> <p>Americans aren't saving money as they were earlier in the pandemic One unexpected outcome of the pandemic was that people saved money like never before. A combination of factors—including federal stimulus checks, extended and enhanced unemployment benefits and shutdowns—meant people weren't spending money on things such as restaurants, entertainment and travel.</p> <p>The U.S. personal saving rate reached a record high of 33.8% in April 2020, shattering the previous record of 17.3% in May 1975. That trend has now reversed, and the rate has fallen to its lowest level in nearly a decade.</p> <p>One important reason is that inflation is outstripping wage growth, causing some Americans to dip into savings to pay for goods and services.</p> <p>Households have struggled with inflation, and now they face higher interest rates</p>

	<p>The Federal Reserve’s move this past week to raise interest rates by a half-percentage point—the largest increase since 2000—is meant to curb decades-high inflation and could be followed by more rate hikes. Fast-rising prices and the Fed’s attempts to combat them will continue to affect Americans’ finances.</p> <p>“Inflation is much too high,” Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday. “And we understand the hardship it is causing, and we’re moving expeditiously to bring it back down.”</p> <p>Monetary tightening can add pressure to consumers already struggling with high prices. Rates on savings accounts should rise slightly with the Fed’s rate, but those changes could take time.</p> <p>Higher rates also mean rising annual percentage rates on credit cards, making it harder for people to buy things and pay later. The same goes for auto loans and mortgage rates, which are already at their highest levels in years.</p> <p>A full recovery in air travel might need to wait longer</p> <p>The number of travelers on commercial airlines has gradually increased since the bottom fell out in March 2020, but the volume still isn’t what it was before the pandemic. While Americans are returning to the skies, a rapid boost in airline fares could crimp planning for long trips.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 US fine line sharing intelligence to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-walks-fine-line-sharing-intelligence-with-ukraine-in-war-with-russia-11651921201?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The United States is walking a fine line as it shares vast amounts of classified intelligence with Ukraine, trying to help Kyiv defeat Russia’s invasion and avoid dragging the U.S. into direct conflict with Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to current and former American officials.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence-sharing policy, they say, in essence comes down to this: Washington provides data on the movement of Russian troops, tanks and ships; Ukraine, which also has its own intelligence capabilities, decides when to take a shot.</p> <p>Revelations this past week that Ukraine used American intelligence to locate and strike the flagship of Russia’s Black Sea fleet, the Moskva, and to conduct strikes that killed Russian generals on the battlefield have heightened focus on what the officials said is a virtually unprecedented pipeline of data being sped from U.S. spy agencies to Ukraine’s government.</p> <p>While U.S. officials openly publicized declassified intelligence about Russia’s plans in the lead-up to its Feb. 24 invasion and in the war’s early weeks, they have been more cautious about describing its battlefield intelligence exchange with Kyiv. Administration spokespersons pushed back vigorously against suggestions Washington was instructing Ukraine on which Russian military platforms to attack or personnel to kill.</p> <p>White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. didn’t give Ukraine “specific targeting information” regarding the Moskva, and didn’t have prior knowledge of Kyiv’s intent to attack the ship, which sank in mid-April after Ukrainian forces struck it with two Neptune missiles.</p> <p>“We do provide a range of intelligence to help them understand the threat posed by Russian ships in the Black Sea and help them prepare to defend themselves against potential sea-based assaults,” she said.</p> <p>As the war grinds through its third month, and the Ukrainians take possession of more advanced weaponry being dispatched by Washington and its allies, it can’t be determined whether the Biden administration can continue to strike what U.S. officials acknowledge is a tricky balance. Mr. Putin isn’t likely to appreciate the nuance in U.S. intelligence-sharing policy, former officials said, heightening the risks that Moscow sees the Biden administration’s direct involvement in attacks that kill Russian soldiers and sailors.</p>

“The way we see it, we’re giving them tactical intelligence—which is, there’s a command center here, there’s a naval vessel there,” said Dan Hoffman, a retired senior Central Intelligence Agency officer who served in Russia. “They make their own decisions.”

Moscow doesn’t view the exchange the same way, however, Mr. Hoffman said. “The key is how the Russians see this, and they want to see this as a proxy war with the United States.”

The Biden administration has also tried to straddle a line in supplying weapons to Ukraine. It has sought to avoid arms that could strike deep into Russia or that Moscow might see as escalatory, such as combat jet fighters.

While Washington has supplied weapons and engaged in intense intelligence sharing with partners before, such as with Iraqi and Afghan counterterrorism units, the rapidly escalating war in Ukraine presents the prospect of direct confrontation with Russia.

The U.S. last month moved to significantly expand the intelligence it provides Ukraine so Kyiv could target Moscow’s forces in Russian-occupied Donbas and Crimea. U.S. officials, citing security concerns, haven’t detailed the information they are sharing, although it is known to include satellite imagery and almost certainly communications intercepts as well.

U.S. officials have outlined only a handful of limits on the intelligence partnership. The U.S., they say, doesn’t provide Ukraine with information that would help it strike targets on Russian territory. Washington also doesn’t share information to help Ukraine target Russia’s top tier of military and civilian leaders, they said.

The U.S. stance on intelligence-sharing, as well as its provision of billions of dollars in weapons to Ukraine, is part of a Biden administration effort to impose steep costs on Russia’s military for its invasion without sparking conflict between the world’s two leading nuclear-armed powers.

“We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said after a late-April visit to Kyiv with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Current and U.S. officials also cautioned against underestimating Ukraine’s own intelligence capabilities, which improved after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and destabilization of the Donbas, with help from the U.S. military and the CIA.

“It’s a big mistake to underestimate the significant intelligence capabilities the Ukrainians themselves have,” CIA director William Burns said Saturday at an event organized by the Financial Times newspaper.

Mr. Burns also criticized reporting in the news media about the intelligence sharing: “It is irresponsible, it’s risky, it’s dangerous when people talk too much.”

Douglas London, a retired 34-year CIA operations officer, said it is clear that the U.S. is giving Ukraine tracking of potential targets, but unclear if that includes data such as live feeds from drones, which Washington has shared with partners in the past.

For the CIA, he said, there is an important distinction between working with proxy forces and working with partners, as in the case of Ukraine.

Proxy military units fall under U.S. command and control, and have to abide by U.S. laws and policies, Mr. London said.

Partners have more latitude.

	“There’s no wink-wink, nod-nodding” when the U.S. provides Ukraine intelligence on the disposition of Russian forces, he said. “We’re not telling them to do it... They’re a sovereign nation, they have an independent agenda.”
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HEADLINE	05/07 Russia: disrupt flow Western weapons
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-says-it-is-targeting-western-military-supplies-in-ukraines-kharkiv-region-11651920741?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>Russia struck military equipment Ukraine received from the U.S. and European countries, Moscow’s Defense Ministry said Saturday, while a Ukrainian official said more civilians were rescued from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol.</p> <p>All women, children and elderly people have been evacuated from Azovstal in Ukraine’s port city of Mariupol, finishing a critical phase in efforts to rescue civilians, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in a Saturday Telegram post.</p> <p>“This part of the Mariupol humanitarian operation has been completed,” she said.</p> <p>Ms. Vereshchuk didn’t specify whether any civilian men remained at the plant. Fifty civilians, including children, were evacuated from the plant on Friday, Ukrainian and Russian officials said.</p> <p>The latest Russian strikes aimed at disrupting the flow of Western weapons to Ukrainian forces occurred near the Bohodukhiv railway station near Kharkiv in northeast Ukraine, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said.</p> <p>Russia’s military also struck an ammunition depot near Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, as well as three ammunition and fuel depots near Dachne in the Odessa region, he said.</p> <p>Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said Saturday that Russian forces were shelling settlements near Kharkiv, as Moscow continued its offensive aimed at taking full control of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and forming a land corridor to Crimea. Ukraine didn’t comment on Russia’s claim of strikes targeting foreign-supplied weapons.</p> <p>Russia lost at least one of its most advanced tanks, the T-90M, in recent fighting, the U.K. Defense Ministry said Saturday.</p> <p>“The conflict in Ukraine is taking a heavy toll on some of Russia’s most capable units and most advanced capabilities,” the U.K. government said. “It will take considerable time and expense for Russia to reconstitute its armed forces following this conflict.”</p> <p>The Ukrainian Defense Ministry on Saturday released video footage of what it said were Bayraktar TB2 armed drones targeting a Russian ship in the Black Sea. The ship appeared to be hit, but it wasn’t clear whether it sank. Russia didn’t comment on the Ukrainian claim, but said it had downed two Bayraktar drones near Snake Island, without providing evidence.</p> <p>The footage came days after it said drones of the same type had hit two Russian naval vessels near Snake Island. Russian forces captured the island located 22 miles off the Ukrainian coast southwest of Odessa on Feb. 24, the first day of the war.</p> <p>Ukraine’s military said it carried out several airstrikes in recent days on the strategic island, destroying the air-defense system and other heavy weapons of the Russian military unit that occupies it.</p> <p>Amid the fighting, Russia was preparing for its coming Victory Day celebration on Monday, which commemorates the defeat of the Nazis in World War II. Tanks, missile-launch systems and soldiers assembled in Moscow’s Red Square Saturday for a dress rehearsal.</p>

Western officials and analysts expect Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) to use Monday's event to address the war in Ukraine, possibly declaring victory or, in what some see as a more likely scenario, pledging to carry on the fight.

Mr. Putin might use the occasion to declare a mass mobilization of the Russian army and its citizens, some Western and Ukrainian defense and intelligence officials have speculated. The Kremlin has brushed off such talk as unfounded rumors.

The U.S. has provided critical military gear for Ukraine's defense, and President Biden on Friday announced another round of security assistance to Ukraine that will include artillery munitions, radars and other equipment.

An administration official said the equipment, valued at up to \$150 million, will include artillery rounds, counterartillery radars, jamming equipment, field equipment and spare parts.

Mr. Biden said that Ukraine funding authorized by Congress is nearly depleted and that he has asked Congress for an additional \$33 billion to fund weapons and provide longer-term economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

First lady Jill Biden was in Eastern Europe Saturday, and received a humanitarian briefing at the U.S. Embassy in Romania on efforts to aid refugees. U.N. officials told Dr. Biden that roughly 7,000 refugees are entering Romania from Ukraine daily. Later in the day, she arrived in Slovakia.

Meanwhile, Russia's blockade of Ukrainian units in the [Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol](#) continued, according to Ukraine's Defense Ministry. Azovstal is a sprawling Soviet-era complex of warehouses, furnaces, tunnels and rail tracks that has become a focal point in the war in recent weeks. Ukrainian soldiers have continued to hold out as Russia has stepped up its bombing of the plant.

Ukrainian [President Volodymyr Zelensky](#) said in a late-evening address Friday that efforts were continuing to find a diplomatic solution to save military personnel at the plant. The United Nations said earlier that almost 500 civilians were evacuated in previous operations with its assistance.

In other developments, the separatist Transnistria region inside Moldova said Saturday that unidentified drones dropped explosives near its border with Ukraine, the latest unexplained blasts to have hit the region in recent weeks.

Transnistria's interior ministry said drones were responsible for four explosions that took place late Friday near a former airfield in the village of Vărăncău. There were no casualties, the ministry said.

The pro-Russian enclave has stirred concern among Moldovan government authorities over the role that some 1,500 Russian troops stationed in Transnistria could play in shoring up Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine, prompting Moldova to place its security forces on alert.

A Russian general recently said that Moscow wants to establish a land corridor from the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol to Crimea and onward to Transnistria.

Elsewhere in Europe, Italian authorities ordered the seizure of the 459-foot motor yacht "Scheherazade," whose owner they said has significant economic and business connections to "prominent elements of the Russian government."

The seizure was ordered under European Union sanctions in response to "actions that compromise or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine," according to Italy's Ministry of Economy and Finance.

	Italian media have reported that the vessel is indirectly owned by Mr. Putin. Russia's Embassy to Italy didn't respond to a request for comment on Saturday.
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HEADLINE	05/07 Sinn Féin celebrates historic victory
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/may/07/sinn-fein-celebrates-victory-but-dup-warns-over-northern-ireland-protocol
GIST	<p>Sinn Féin is celebrating a historic victory in the Stormont assembly elections despite warnings from the Democratic Unionist party that it will block the formation of a new power-sharing executive until the Northern Ireland Brexit protocol is changed.</p> <p>On Saturday evening it was confirmed Sinn Féin would become the largest party, with 27 seats, pushing the DUP into second place.</p> <p>The other big winner was the cross-community Alliance, which increased its first-preference vote share to 13.5%, leapfrogging the struggling UUP and SDLP to become Stormont's third largest party for the first time.</p> <p>Sinn Féin will nominate its deputy leader, Michelle O'Neill, as the Northern Ireland's first nationalist first minister.</p> <p>While unionists at some count centres were left visibly stunned by the scale of their defeat, there was jubilation among supporters of Sinn Féin, whose leader, Mary Lou McDonald, told TalkTV she believed a border poll on a united Ireland would be possible "within a five-year timeframe".</p> <p>But with just two seats between Sinn Féin and the DUP by mid-afternoon, it was not the collapse predicted by the polls. "[The] tumult was not utterly catastrophic for the DUP, but the crown is lost," said Jon Tonge, a professor of politics at Liverpool University.</p> <p>Alliance looked likely to double its previous total of eight seats, largely at the expense of the UUP, the SDLP, and the Green party, whose leader Clare Bailey lost her seat.</p> <p>It was also a sobering day for Doug Beattie, the UUP leader, who scraped in on the seventh count.</p> <p>Sinn Féin, the DUP and Alliance, and possibly other parties that may clear a threshold, will have up to 24 weeks to form a new executive, under new laws signed off in Westminster.</p> <p>However the DUP leader, Jeffrey Donaldson, said he would refuse to join a new administration until the UK government "dealt with" the protocol in the Brexit deal that put a trade border in the Irish Sea.</p> <p>Without a first minister and deputy first minister, the executive cannot function fully, with ministers prevented from making new policy, signing off budgets or introducing much-needed healthcare reforms.</p> <p>John O'Dowd, a Sinn Féin MLA, urged the DUP to respect the democratic result.</p> <p>Gregory Campbell, a DUP MP, signalled the party could in principle accept O'Neill as first minister. "The people have spoken," he told RTÉ.</p> <p>Senior DUP sources said they would seek an urgent summit with Downing Street to press home the message that their boycott could put the assembly on pause until Christmas. Under the laws introduced in February aimed at preventing a full collapse of power sharing, parties will have four sets of six-week windows to form an executive, or cabinet.</p> <p>If no executive is formed, the Northern Ireland secretary must call a new election, which in turn must be held within 12 weeks, pushing the chances of a full devolved government back to December.</p>

	<p>The DUP also faces another urgent dilemma. After a ban on double-jobbing, Donaldson will have to decide if he remains an MP or takes up his new seat as an MLA and force a byelection for Westminster. DUP sources predict he will anoint a stand-in to take his assembly post during the expected Stormont impasse and take the MLA seat himself only if an executive is formed.</p> <p>The surge in seats for the Alliance party reflecting a growing appetite for progressive, non-constitutional politics.</p> <p>“I don’t really like the unionists or the nationalists. I’d like to see a party for Northern Ireland, not for division,” said Natasha Nesbitt, 19, an engineering student and first-time voter. “I feel Northern Ireland is quite behind on issues like abortion. I hope when my generation are older Sinn Féin and the DUP will go down and others will go up.”</p> <p>Colin Lloyd, a retired engineer who switched from unionists to the Alliance party. “With Sinn Féin and the unionists, it’s the same old thing all the time. We are missing out on the bigger issues such as the environment. We are stuck with the same things we had 30 or 40 years ago.”</p> <p>His wife, Maureen, a former housing official, said she split her vote among three parties. “It is time to move on,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Putin choices: peril on eve Victory Day
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/putin-choices-are-filled-with-peril-on-the-eve-of-victory-day-parade-russia-ukraine
GIST	<p>On the brink of its May 9 Victory Day celebrations, Russia looks very far from triumph in its war in Ukraine. And all of its options going forward are fraught with danger.</p> <p>After a disastrous assault on Kyiv, Russia is engaged in an attempt to take territory in Ukraine’s east, as its military nears exhaustion and sanctions continue to escalate.</p> <p>“With the current force that they have, the push that they’re attempting now is all that they have left,” said Jeffrey Edmonds, former director for Russia on the US national security council and senior analyst at the CNA thinktank.</p> <p>“Military just don’t recover that quickly from such a devastating loss. And given how effective the Ukrainians have been with our support, I just don’t think they’re going to be able to achieve their objectives within the coming weeks. And the coming weeks are going to be the telltale of where this is going.”</p> <p>Facing setbacks, officials have suggested that Vladimir Putin may use the May 9 holiday to repackage the war in Ukraine. Dramatic options include escalation through a formal declaration of war or general mobilisation – or de-escalating by proclaiming victory.</p> <p>Alternatively, Putin could offer up a “sandwich”, as one analyst put it, that praises the Russian army’s “victory” while preparing the population for a grinding and painful conflict as status quo.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials in particular have warned that Putin is planning to announce a mass mobilisation, or even to declare war against Ukraine, calling up personnel and resources that were untapped under Russia’s so-called “special operation” that began on 24 February.</p> <p>“Russia has already moved to covert mobilisation and is preparing to announce open mobilisation in the near future,” said Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukraine’s military intelligence, in an interview this week with the Ukrainian news outlet New Times. “I’m quite curious: how will they explain this to their own people?”</p>

The Kremlin has denied it is planning a mobilisation, although some Russians have leaked call-up papers and state orders relating to a potential mobilisation online. A number of enlistment offices have been targeted in arson attacks since March, including one in remote Nizhnevartovsk last week as rumours of a coming mobilisation grew.

But a formal mobilisation, which could see tens of thousands of reservists pulled from their jobs, and borders closed to fighting-age men, is something that Russia has never managed before. It would be highly disruptive to the economy and would further raise the stakes in a war where Russia has already disappointed on the battlefield.

“Proclaiming mobilisation will make this war highly unpopular,” said Pavel Luzin, a Russian military expert. He also questioned whether it would be “technically possible” – “What can you do with the mobilised people? Which officers and military units can deal with them?”

“This is no magic pill for them, it’s not a get-out-of-jail free card for Putin,” Edmonds said, noting that by the time new troops were brought up, the “Russians could be falling apart”.

Fearing defeat, Russia may threaten to raise the stakes even further. Top propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov showed a simulation of a nuclear strike against the UK on national television this week. “Just one launch, Boris, and England is gone,” he said. “Once and for all. Why play with us?”

Putin may also hint at the potential for nuclear conflict as he stands before the heavy weaponry, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, that he returned to the Red Square parade in 2008.

“He also knows that we’re going to be listening to him, so I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s some nuclear rhetoric in there as well,” said the CNA’s Edmonds.

He said he remained sceptical that Russia could use a tactical nuclear weapon in the conflict, but like others noted that the Kremlin has become more unpredictable. “If Putin sees this as becoming existential, then all bets are off the table.”

Seeing the limited potential for victory, Putin could also seek to de-escalate the conflict. Standing before his military and the country on Monday, Putin could announce that Russia has achieved its major war aims in Ukraine by allegedly destroying Ukrainian military capacity, and by taking near control of several mid-sized cities such as Mariupol and Kherson.

But that may also be a tough sell, as the Ukrainian military could try to retake lost ground, leading to further losses even if Russia stakes a defensive position.

A senior Russian official last week in Kherson said that Russia had returned “forever,” making the idea of a political settlement that would return control of its territory to Ukraine even more remote.

And as Ben Noble, an associate professor of Russian politics at University College London, noted, the Kremlin’s vague and changing war aims have meant that many people in Russia may be left unsatisfied with whatever Putin eventually claims as victory.

“That’s probably the strongest reason why many people say that the Kremlin is in a corner now, that they’re stuck, because they’re inevitably going to disappoint some groups with whatever they claim as a victory in the broader term,” he said.

Expectations of a big announcement on 9 May, he said, may speak more to the frustration among those outside the Kremlin than to the fact that anything meaningful will be announced. “They want a sense of certainty, they want a new chapter in this conflict,” he said.

While the Kremlin may feel political and economic pressure to end the war, a grinding conflict may be better than admitting defeat.

“I assume he will use the 9th of May to somehow address the victory ... something a lot of sociologists tell us is that Russians want this to be over but in a good way,” said Anton Barbashin, the editorial director at Riddle Russia and a political analyst.

“But I would expect that he also needs to introduce some new challenges as well. It needs to be a sandwich, it can’t be just victory. There is so much going on, and by now Putin is aware of the economic risks and problems that are going to arise quite soon. So you probably need to propose a strong vision of how Russia is challenged.”

That is already visible in state media reports that explain Russia is at war with Nato rather than just with Ukraine in order to justify some of the military’s recent defeats.

The Kremlin is also facing an urgent ideological challenge, Barbashin noted, as the war increasingly begins to affect ordinary Russians who may not have a clear idea of why Russia decided that it would invade Ukraine in the first place.

“The more I think of it, the more astonishing it is that this war has shown that Russia has no ideology whatsoever,” he said.

“They’re trying to come up with something new but none of it actually makes sense. Russians do not understand what the hell Russia is doing there.”

Victory Day ... as seen on TV

While Russia’s main military parade will be held on Red Square on 9 May, for millions of Russians, Victory Day is a spectacle that will play out on state television.

The national holiday is spent with the TV on in many households, where the parade is bookended by news broadcasts and, usually, by Soviet war films and Russian blockbusters about the second world war. But this year may be different.

The parade, which begins at 10am with a review of the troops and a speech by Putin, is among the most-watched programmes of the entire year in Russia. State-affiliated pollsters estimate that more than half of households watch it, although those numbers could be inflated.

While rumours have swirled about a major announcement by Putin of a military mobilisation or a “mission accomplished” message, he usually dedicates the speech to familiar lines about the “spectre of fascism” and a recognition of recognising veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Drought: Arizona braces more water cuts
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/07/arizona-water-cuts-megadrought-colorado-river
GIST	<p>Arizona water authorities are bracing for additional cuts to the quantity of water supplied by the Colorado River, prompting calls for more aggressive conservation measures to prevent further reductions. Officials in Arizona state predict that these cuts could come as soon as August, the Phoenix NBC Affiliate 12 News reported Friday.</p> <p>These expected cuts stem from the effects of a decades-long megadrought, which has been greatly exacerbated by the climate crisis. Moreover, the Colorado River, which provides water to almost 40 million people, has been imperiled due to decades of overuse. The river’s reservoirs, Lake Mead and Lake Powell, have seen worsening declines in their water levels.</p>

Arizona is typically granted 2.8m acre-feet of water from the Colorado River. The US Bureau of Reclamation, which manages water and hydropower in the south-west, declared its first water shortage in 2021; federal mandates and state-based efforts resulted in Arizona leaving 500,000 acre-feet “behind Hoover Dam” this year, according to AZCentral.com.

The Bureau of Reclamation makes mandates based on water levels in Lake Mead, which are determined by upstream disbursements from Lake Powell. The water level in Lake Powell has approached the minimum required to produce hydropower that provides electricity for several million residents, AZCentral.com said.

Arizona’s department of water resources, and Central Arizona Project (CAP), have insisted that the state must take further measures to save water. Tom Buschatzke, the water department’s director, said that if the reclamation bureau predicts further cuts in 2023, “there should be serious consideration by water providers to start going down that path”.

“Most of the water use is outside the home,” Ted Cooke, CAP Deputy director, reportedly said to 12 News. “It’s in the yard, it’s pools, it’s plants, it’s lawns.” While Arizona water providers have never required residential water reductions, some city governments did curtail their own usage amid a severe dry period in 2004.

Buschatzke said that if water from the Rocky Mountain snowpack does not boost the reservoirs in 2023, a more serious shortage could impact Arizona cities’ water supplies. “Look at all of those factors and it’s probably time to start doing something at the homeowner level or the business level,” Buschatzke told AZCentral. “I can’t dictate that, but I might urge those folks to consider doing that.”

Officials said that Arizona homeowners are not likely to see “dry taps” anytime soon, as there have been initiatives to store unused Colorado River water in underground aquifers. However, it’s possible that cities will consider tapping these reserves for outdoor purposes, which could start depleting them – without any clear path to replenishing the water, AZCentral.com reported.

In addition to Arizona, potential water cuts next year could also impact Nevada and Mexico and, eventually, California. “The gravity of the immediate situation is serious,” Buschatzke, told The Los Angeles Times. “We expect further significant actions to reduce water use will be required.”

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HEADLINE	05/06 War taking toll on Ukraine wheat harvest
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/06/ukraine-wheat-harvest-may-fall-by-35-percent-satellite-images-suggest
GIST	<p>Wheat production in Ukraine is likely to be at least a third lower than in normal years, according to analysis of satellite images of the country.</p> <p>Ukraine is one of the world’s biggest exporters of wheat, but the war is taking a toll on the country’s agriculture and food supplies, sparking fears of shortages or higher prices around the world.</p> <p>Last year, Ukraine produced about 33m tonnes of wheat, of which it exported about 20m tonnes, making it the sixth-largest exporter globally. This year, with the situation as it stands, the country only has the potential to produce about 21m tonnes of wheat, down about 23% on the average of the previous five years, according to analysis published on Friday by the satellite analysis company Kayrros.</p> <p>But with more disruption from the war extremely likely, and fighting concentrated in the east where the main wheat-growing regions are found, Kayrros estimates that the wheat harvest is likely to be down by at least 35% this year compared with 2021.</p> <p>Ukraine has already moved to ban exports of grain and many other food products, in an effort to preserve its own food supplies. Transport is also difficult, with Russia blockading the country’s Black Sea coast.</p>

Global wheat prices [leapt by 20% in March](#), owing to the direct impact of the war on wheat production, as well as higher energy and fertiliser prices around the world. These costs were already rising before Russia's invasion, but have been sent soaring further as countries have moved to cut imports of oil and gas from Russia.

While wheat prices have since slipped back slightly from record highs, analysts at Rabobank predict they could rise again due to the war in Ukraine, where it is predicting production could fall by slightly more than 20%, as well as sanctions on Russia and dry and hot conditions in other wheat-producing nations including the US and India.

Carlos Mera, an analyst at Rabobank, said prices would remain high as it was unlikely leading global producers would be able to increase production significantly, because of high fertiliser prices and pressure to grow other crops where prices were also rising.

Russia and Ukraine are also big producers of fertiliser, which has further raised input prices for farmers.

He added: "It is not just a question of how much wheat Ukraine will harvest but how much it will manage to export.

Normally 90% of grain exports flow through ports into the Black Sea but we are not going to see that [because of Russian military action]." He said exports via train had also been affected by attacks on railway lines.

Food price rises are now a [serious cause of concern around the world](#). People on low incomes in developing countries were already facing problems because the pandemic had depleted their resources, while conflict has led to countries such as Yemen and Afghanistan teetering on the brink of famine.

The climate crisis is [also taking a toll](#). In recent weeks, a heatwave in south Asia has left millions of people facing heat stress. The heat is likely to reduce crop yields, and could affect India's wheat harvest.

Last year, heatwaves in Canada disrupted its wheat-growing and led to higher prices for pasta. Australia, another major wheat producer, has had heavy flooding this year.

In the UK, Brexit has added about 6% to food prices, according to the London School of Economics.

Much of Ukraine's wheat went to the Middle East, forcing countries there to be even more dependent on Russia for grain supplies. Egypt, for instance, which will host the next UN climate summit, Cop27, this November, is reliant on Ukraine and Russia for about 80% of its wheat.

Kayrros uses artificial intelligence combined with data from satellites to monitor commodities, biomass and other environmental concerns such as methane. Antoine Halff, its co-founder, said: "Monitoring geopolitical events in near real-time is critical to understanding them and mitigating their impacts. The impacts of the terrible war in Ukraine can sadly be seen from space, and this data illustrates the spectre of rising food prices and hunger the world faces as a consequence of this conflict."

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HEADLINE	05/07 US intelligence told to keep quiet over role
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/07/us-spies-ukraine-russia-military-intelligence
GIST	<p>Former US intelligence officers are advising their successors currently in office to shut up and stop boasting about their role in Ukraine's military successes.</p> <p>Two stories surfaced in as many days in the American press this week, citing unnamed officials as saying that US intelligence was instrumental in the targeting of Russian generals on the battlefield and in the sinking of the Moskva flagship cruiser on the Black Sea.</p>

The initial report in the New York Times on Wednesday about the generals was partially denied by the White House, which said that while the US shares intelligence with Ukrainian forces, it was not specifically shared with the intent to kill Russian general officers.

The next day, NBC, the New York Times and the Washington Post all quoted officials as saying that US intelligence had helped Ukraine hit the Moskva with anti-ship missiles last month, making it the biggest Russian ship to be sunk since the second world war.

As a general rule, espionage is carried out in secret, though western intelligence agencies have turned that rule on its head over the past few months by going public with what they knew about Russian preparations for invasion, and then with daily reports on the battlefield and from behind Russian lines.

The new disclosures are different however, as they concern what the US espionage agencies themselves have been doing, rather than commenting on the state of the war.

In both cases, the US was claiming a hand in historic humiliations for Moscow and for Vladimir Putin, triggering warnings of unintended consequences.

Paul Pillar, a former senior CIA official, said: “My personal view is it’s unwise. I am surprised at the extent of official confirmation of the role of US intelligence in the sinking into Moscow, and even more so the killing of the generals.

“The big concern is that this sort of public confirmation of this extensive US role in the setbacks dealt to the Russians may provoke Putin into escalation in a way that he might not otherwise feel it necessary to escalate.”

John Sipher, who served for 28 years in the CIA’s clandestine service, some of that time in Moscow, thought the decision to disclose details of intelligence sharing was misguided, but for different reasons.

“I just think it’s disrespectful to the Ukrainians,” Sipher said. “It’s taking away from the people who are actually on the ground, who are taking advantage of the intelligence, who are collecting their own intelligence, who are fighting day and night.”

However, he did not think that it significantly raised the risk of escalation between Russia and Nato.

“Putin understands how the game is played. He gets intelligence to try to kill Americans if the situation is reversed, as he did in Afghanistan and other places. The Russians have spent years attacking us with cyber warfare and disinformation,” Sipher said.

“So I don’t think them being upset that America is sharing intelligence is a game-changer.”

European officials made clear their own intelligence agencies would not be following the US lead.

“It’s stupid,” one official said. “I don’t think it is a carefully coordinated leak.”

An official from another European country cast doubt on the centrality of US intelligence to the Ukrainian targeting of Russian generals, saying the main factor was the predictability of Russian officers as they followed rigid Soviet-era doctrine. The breakdown in their secure communications equipment and the top-down hierarchy of the Russian army meant the top officers had to travel to the frontlines to be sure their orders were carried out and Ukrainian snipers were waiting for them.

In the case of the Moskva, US officials were at pains to emphasise that Ukraine made its own targeting decisions, and drew information from multiple sources.

	<p>“We are not the only sole source of intelligence and information to the Ukrainians. They get intelligence from other nations as well and have a pretty robust intelligence collection capability,” John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, said.</p> <p>“They’ve been fighting this war against Russia for eight years. It’s not like they are completely blind to the way Russia organises itself and the way Russia conducts itself on the battlefield.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Missiles hit Odesa, drone sinks Russia ship
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/odesa-missiles-ukraine-sunk-russian-ship-drone-claims
GIST	<p>The Ukrainian port city of Odesa was hit by renewed Russian missile strikes on Saturday, as military authorities in Kyiv claimed one of their drones had sunk a second Russian ship in the Black Sea.</p> <p>A counter-offensive against Russia also appeared to be gathering pace in the north, where analysts said that Ukraine’s military may be able to push Russian forces out of artillery range of the country’s second city of Kharkiv in the coming days.</p> <p>The Ukrainian claim to have destroyed another Russian ship – after the sinking of the warship Moskva in the Black Sea last month – was accompanied by footage showing what was said to have been a strike by a Bayraktar drone on a vessel docked at Snake Island.</p> <p>“The traditional parade of the Russian Black Sea fleet on 9 May this year will be held near Snake Island – at the bottom of the sea,” tweeted Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence.</p> <p>Satellite photos analysed by the Associated Press show the aftermath of an apparent Ukrainian drone strike on Friday on Russian positions on Snake Island, with thick black smoke rising overhead.</p> <p>Images showed what appeared to be a Russian Serna-class landing craft at Snake Island’s northern beach. They corresponded to another Ukrainian military video released showing a drone strike hitting it and engulfing the vessel in flames.</p> <p>Elsewhere, a Ukrainian deputy prime minister said all women, children and elderly people had been evacuated from the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol.</p> <p>Ukraine had said 50 civilians were evacuated on Friday, but accused Russia of violating a ceasefire intended to allow dozens more still trapped at the plant to leave.</p> <p>The final evacuees followed about 500 others who were allowed to leave the plant and other parts of the city in recent days.</p> <p>Russia’s defence ministry confirmed the completion of an operation to evacuate civilians from the plant. In an online posting, the ministry said a total of 51 people had been rescued since the three-day operation started on Thursday, including one person on Saturday. The 51 comprised 18 men, 22 women and 11 children, it added.</p> <p>In Moscow, Russia’s most senior lawmaker accused the US of coordinating military operations in Ukraine, which he said amounted to direct US involvement in military action against Russia.</p> <p>“Washington is essentially coordinating and developing military operations, thereby directly participating in military actions against our country,” Vyacheslav Volodin wrote on his Telegram channel.</p> <p>Washington and European members of the transatlantic Nato alliance have supplied Kyiv with heavy weapons to help it resist a Russian offensive that has resulted in the occupation of parts of eastern and southern Ukraine but failed to take Kyiv.</p>

However, the US and its Nato allies have repeatedly said they will not take part in fighting themselves, in order to avoid becoming parties to the conflict.

The conflict in Ukraine is taking a “heavy toll” on some of Russia’s most capable units, the UK’s Ministry of Defence said in [its latest intelligence report](#).

At least one T-90M, Russia’s most advanced tank, has been destroyed in fighting, the ministry added. “It will take considerable time and expense for Russia to reconstitute its armed forces following this conflict,” the report said.

A Washington-based thinktank, the Institute for the Study of War, also said in [its most recent assessment](#) that Ukraine’s military may be able to push Russian forces “out of artillery range of Kharkiv in the coming days”, providing a respite for the city and an opportunity to build the defenders’ momentum “into a successful, broader counteroffensive”.

Meanwhile, several missiles hit Odesa earlier on Saturday, according to a Ukrainian local government spokesperson, after [targets in the surrounding region had been hit by four missiles earlier](#).

The strikes outside the city were from four Russian cruise missiles fired from aircraft, according to Natalia Humeniuk, the spokesperson for the Ukrainian military’s southern operational command.

She added that the strike targeted the city of Arcyz and no one was injured.

The World Health Organization told Ukrainians in Kyiv on Saturday that the WHO stood by them in their conflict with Russia, and urged Moscow to stop waging war on its neighbour.

The director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said: “My message to all the people of Ukraine is this, WHO stands by you.”

The WHO emergencies director, Mike Ryan, told the same news conference at the government media centre in Kyiv that the WHO had already documented 200 attacks on healthcare facilities in Ukraine, and would pass its findings on to those who could assess whether crimes had been committed.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Day 73 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-73-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The UN Security Council issued its first statement on the war in Ukraine, but withheld from using the words “war”, “conflict” or “invasion”. The statement instead “expresses deep concern regarding the maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine” and voiced “strong support” for Secretary General Antonio Guterres in seeking a peaceful solution to the “dispute”.• The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said the besieged southern port city of Mariupol is “an example of torture and starvation used as a weapon of war”. He also confirmed in his latest national address, evacuation operations are continuing in Mariupol with 40 civilians rescued.• Three evacuation buses left the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol , according to Russian media reports. Buses carrying 25 civilians including children were brought out from the plant to a camp in the Russian-controlled town of Bezimenne. An estimated 200 civilians, along with Ukrainian resistance fighters, remained trapped in underground refuges at the huge industrial complex.• On peace talks, Zelenskiy said he was “elected as president of Ukraine and not a mini-Ukraine”, and that Russia must first fall back to the territory it held before its invasion on 23 February if talks are to succeed. He also accused Russia of “outright nuclear blackmail” during the speech at Chatham, the international affairs think tank, saying “Russia is blackmailing Europe through threats”.

- **The latest US military aid package to Ukraine, announced by president Joe Biden, is worth \$150m**, secretary of state Antony Blinken confirmed. It includes 25,000 155mm artillery rounds, as well as counter-artillery radars, jamming equipment, field equipment and spare parts. It brings Washington's military assistance to Kyiv since the Russian invasion began to around \$3.8bn, Blinken said.
- **US defense department spokesperson John Kirby deflected questions about whether the Pentagon provided information** to Ukraine that helped military leaders target Russian generals. Kirby would not corroborate the [reports](#), instead saying Ukraine "makes the decisions" when it comes to how they use US intel and stressed that Ukraine combines intelligence from many countries and the US is "not the sole source of intelligence and information to the Ukrainians".
- **Germany will also send seven self-propelled howitzers to Ukraine, on top of five artillery systems the Dutch government has already pledged**, the German defence minister, **Christine Lambrecht**, said. [The PzH 2000 is one of the most powerful artillery weapons in the Bundeswehr inventories](#) and can hit targets at a distance of 40km (25 miles).
- **Vladimir Putin will send a "doomsday" warning to the west when he leads Russia's Victory Day celebrations on Monday**. A [fly-past over St Basil's Cathedral will include the Il-80 "doomsday" command plane](#), which would carry Russia's top brass in the event of a nuclear war, Russia's defence ministry said.
- **A yacht reportedly belonging to Putin was seized by Italian officials**. Reporters say the yacht, which had been moored in a Tuscany marina, [belongs](#) to Putin. The ministry of economy and finance said in a statement the boat was seized under regulations relating to "actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine".
- **Russia's foreign ministry said it had summoned Britain's ambassador to Russia, Deborah Bronnert, adding that it strongly protested in relation to new UK sanctions on Russian media**. Russia would continue to react "harshly and decisively" to all sanctions imposed by the UK, [the ministry said in a statement](#).
- **Amnesty International said there was compelling evidence that Russian troops had committed war crimes in the Kyiv area in February and March**. Civilians also suffered [abuses such as "reckless shootings and torture" at the hands of Russian forces](#) when they occupied an area outside Ukraine's capital, including the town of Bucha, in the early stages of the invasion, the rights group said in a report.
- **Russian troops are attempting to encircle and storm Severodonetsk, the easternmost city in Ukraine held by Kyiv, a local official said**. [Severodonetsk's capture would be a major gain for the Russian army](#) which has refocused its efforts on taking the whole of the eastern Donbas region.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Restaurants: prices, staff shortages, angst
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/life/food-drink/seattle-area-restaurants-new-reality-higher-food-prices-staffing-shortages/
GIST	<p>For diners stopping in at Marjorie, a restaurant on Seattle's Capitol Hill, the full tables and busy staff might give the impression that the pandemic is truly, finally over.</p> <p>They can eat and drink like before times and "walk away thinking, 'well, they made it ... everything is back to normal,'" says owner Donna Moodie.</p> <p>But for Moodie, everything is most assuredly not back to normal.</p> <p>Her menu is smaller now, in part because two years of supply chain chaos and price inflation mean some items were too costly to serve — among them, Moodie's signature bestseller, crabcakes.</p> <p>She also has just eight employees, half the number she had before the pandemic, thanks to a labor shortage that is still wreaking havoc on restaurants across the region. That's limiting how much business Moodie and other restaurants can do, and thus how fast they can recover.</p>

Moodie expects things to improve somewhat as the pandemic fades. But after two years of false starts and setbacks, she no longer hopes to get back the life she had before COVID. “The future we’re looking at,” says Moodie, pausing. “It’s a different model.”

On the surface, the Seattle area’s restaurant scene is roaring back to its pre-pandemic self. Consumer spending at restaurants has nearly recovered. Many of the old hot spots are packed again on weekends. Masks, social distancing and other public health measures are in decline — for now, at least.

Yet COVID’s effects are still visible everywhere. Once-exotic labor-saving technologies, such as QR code ordering, have become everyday and routine.

But restaurants are also still grappling with many of COVID’s less positive consequences.

In others words, diners should be prepared for restaurant experiences that may be quite a bit different from what they had before.

Yes, prices will be higher (but not as high as they should be)

For diners like Adam Levy, the Great Reopening has been bittersweet. As delighted as he is about in-person dining, the prices many restaurants now charge mean dinner for Levy, his wife and two teenage sons “could easily get [to] \$120, \$130 bucks — and that is a big expense,” adds the Seattle resident. “We’re definitely cooking more.”

He may be cooking even more still, given how hard inflation continues to hit restaurants.

At Spice Waala, a popular Indian street food counter, co-owner Uttam Mukherjee watched his wholesale prices nearly triple since 2020. In the past six months alone, eggs are up 229%; spices, 225%. Onions, an eye-watering 415%.

“Restaurants are currently at the mercy of things that are not in our control,” he says.

Yet like many of his peers, Mukherjee has been reluctant to pass those increases to his customers, in part because he’s seen the backlash other restaurants have faced after boosting prices.

In April, he raised prices for the first time since opening in 2019, and then only barely. His popular chicken tikka roll went up 50 cents, to \$7.50. His other rolls and snacks increased by a mere 7%.

Mukherjee’s situation isn’t unique. Many restaurants have simply absorbed the narrower profits rather than risk losing customers, or jettisoned menu items that became too costly to sell profitably.

When wholesale wing prices quadrupled to \$4 a pound, Trey Lamont, owner of Jerk Shack in Seattle’s Belltown, knew he had to drop his popular jerk-fried chicken wings or take a loss on every order. “The regulars hated that,” Lamont says, but such decisions were necessary “so that we could stay afloat.”

Those tactics are only short-term. With restaurant profit margins being squeezed — from 12% in 2019 to 10% in 2021 nationally, [according to a report](#) by TouchBistro, a restaurant automation company — and inflation unabated, many restaurateurs will have little choice but to start pricing realistically and hope customers understand.

“No one is ripping you off — there is a ton of thought that goes into pricing of food,” says Syd Suntha, who this spring started a Sri Lankan food cart, Kottu.

“If you think I charge too much, know that I don’t have health insurance,” he adds.

Labor pains

As diners crowd back into restaurants and bars, another big pandemic hangover has become glaringly obvious: Many places are still woefully understaffed, despite offering higher wages, benefits and even hefty signing bonuses.

In the Seattle area alone, restaurants were still down around 12,000 jobs, or 10%, in March 2022 versus two years earlier, according to state data. By contrast, the region's job market as a whole has almost completely recovered.

That has forced restaurants to make major changes, some of which may outlast COVID.

Many of the temporary workarounds restaurants adopted to replace missing workers are becoming permanent. At Chengdu Taste in the Chinatown International District, for instance, most patrons now scan their orders and even pay for their meal without a server.

"The most [time] consuming labor part is the ordering process," says co-owner Sean Xie. "You have to have one server standing by the table to get the order. And the second thing is the paying process, where you have to get the card and swipe the card."

Xie estimates that 90% of his food orders now come directly via QR codes, and about 20% of customers pay by scanning their credit cards. The system is now doing the work equivalent of at least one server and freed up his understaffed crew to answer phones and clean tables.

The labor shortage has also brought other, less attractive changes. Early in the pandemic, many customers sympathized with overworked staff. But some workers say that early solidarity has soured.

Many customers are less patient and more easily irritated by longer waits. "Now, they're just fed up," says Samantha, who worked until recently at a restaurant north of Seattle and asked that her last name not be used to avoid upsetting a former employer.

And while some industry [data suggests tipping increased during the pandemic](#), a number of workers said that honeymoon is also over. Tips have "normalized" back to 18%-20%, says Jason, an Eastside bar manager. That "isn't bad," but it's not as high as when restaurants were just reopening and "people were just ... super grateful."

That points to the industry's deeper labor problem: Many restaurant workers laid off early in the pandemic simply don't want to come back.

When veteran chef Lucas Steinmacher was laid off from a Seattle cooking job in 2020, he noticed that his chronic back pain began to fade. He also resumed the outdoor activities he used to enjoy.

After some "soul searching to find out what I actually wanted to do," Steinmacher realized that no longer meant restaurants; he's training for a career in software development. Steinmacher's escape is hardly unique. When he talks with former colleagues, "a lot of people have transitioned out," he says.

"The pandemic made people self-reflect more," admits Eric Banh, who hasn't found an experienced sous chef for his Capitol Hill noodle house Ba Bar despite offering \$70,000 in salary and tips, health insurance and a retirement plan. "They want to spend more time with family. They don't have to work weekends. They want to finish by 5."

Playing for time

Chronic understaffing isn't just making customers wait. It also means restaurants may be turning away customers and forgoing revenue at a time when many are struggling to cover financial losses and repay debts racked up during the pandemic.

In Washington state, the average restaurant location incurred more than \$160,000 in back rent, bridge loans and other COVID-related debt during the pandemic, according to the Washington Hospitality Association. before the pandemic.

Federal and state governments have tried to help struggling restaurants, but those efforts fell far short.

For example, more than 3,200 Washington restaurants got grants under the federal Restaurant Revitalization Fund — the grants averaged \$284,000, though some, like Sea-Town Restaurants, the company behind chef Tom Douglas' restaurants, got \$10 million. But another 4,000 Washington restaurants that applied didn't get any funds from the now-depleted RRF program.

Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell are pushing to replenish the RRF, but the prospects are unclear. For now, the uneven distribution of relief has added to financial challenges for those who missed out and created what some see as a two-tiered industry.

Restaurants that got the federal funding can "pay their employees a lot higher salaries," says Jerk Shack's Lamont, who just lost a prep cook to a restaurant that got the funding. "I can't compete with that."

The pandemic isn't only limiting how fully restaurants can operate, but also where.

Before COVID, downtown Seattle's restaurant scene, though not as big or vibrant as Ballard's or Capitol Hill's, was gaining ground. But after two years of empty offices and hotel vacancies, some restaurateurs say downtown's attractiveness is on hold, even as many restaurants in neighborhoods, especially those with lots of still-remote office workers, are booming.

"Queen Anne, Ballard, Capitol Hill — all those places are all busy," says Seattle-area restaurant owner Ethan Stowell, whose neighborhood locations bustle even as his downtown locations are either still closed or are running behind pre-COVID volumes. "Downtown Seattle is pretty dead."

Those challenges point to a sobering irony: many restaurateurs who survived the pandemic now may opt to pull the plug rather than go deeper into debt. "We're already starting to see some closures," says Anthony Anton, president and CEO of WHA, which has recorded more than 3,300 closures statewide since January 2020.

Waiting for the 'new normal'

Just how all this plays out over the next year or so is hard to forecast. Many veteran restaurateurs expect that much of the old restaurant business model and culture will eventually return — but they also think many of the COVID impacts will stick around, and maybe permanently.

For example, diners should expect more waits but also more labor-saving adaptations, such as QR ordering, counter service and even [tasting menus](#), as restaurants adapt to the labor shortage.

Takeout and delivery will likely remain a bigger part of the restaurant experience than they were before COVID. Even though many restaurants regard these services as a hassle that can compromise food quality, they can still help restaurants deal with short labor.

As important, because customers now expect the convenience and safety that take-out and delivery can offer, recovery-focused restaurants may have little choice but to keep offering them.

Even post-pandemic, those services could still bring in as much as 10% of a restaurant's total sales, says Stowell. "Ten percent is what I do in beer sales," says Stowell. "And no one would cancel beer sales" just because they're complicated.

Paradoxically, for all the innovation, many post-pandemic restaurants are likely to be even more cautious. Desperate though they are to regain their old levels of business, many restaurants are nonetheless only slowly ramping up their capacity and only as they see proof of demand and can confidently hire staff.

	<p>Likewise, while labor-saving technologies and tactics may be helpful, they may also bring new challenges. Restaurants that rely more on delivery, for example, could face new uncertainty as delivery drivers demand better wages and working conditions. And restaurant owners will be watching closely for any sign that customers are getting turned off by the strategies and gadgetry.</p> <p>Some already are. Though he understands why restaurants went to QR code menus and ordering early in the pandemic, Levy can't wait for that innovation to go away.</p> <p>"I didn't like it then, but I especially don't like it now," says Levy, who sees the act of ordering food as a small but essential chance to break from our self-absorbed, digitized work lives and reconnect with people, with the physical world, with <i>food</i>.</p> <p>Ordering off a screen, says Levy, "I just think it's so impersonal."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Seattle settles mayor missing texts lawsuit
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/city-settles-seattle-times-lawsuit-over-jenny-durkans-missing-text-messages/
GIST	<p>The city of Seattle agreed to pay nearly \$200,000 and improve its public records process in a settlement with The Seattle Times this week.</p> <p>It brings to a close the newspaper's public records lawsuit over more than 2,000 text messages from former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan's iPhone that were deleted during a tumultuous period in the summer of 2020, which included the formation of the Capitol Hill Organized Protest zone.</p> <p>While the settlement can't restore the texts, it does force the city to make changes in how it retains and releases government communications going forward. State law generally requires government records to be saved and available to the public, to ensure voters have unvarnished information to hold elected officials accountable.</p> <p>"We file a case like this because we feel it is important for the public to see these records," Seattle Times Executive Editor Michele Matassa Flores said. "We're happy to have this resolved, and that the city has agreed to the reforms. That's what is most important for us."</p> <p>Under the terms of the settlement, the city denies any liability for the way it managed public records requests from four Times reporters.</p> <p>"The city is pleased that it was able to resolve the public records case brought against it by The Seattle Times," city attorney spokesperson Anthony Derrick said in a statement. He added that the city "shares the common goal of improving governmental transparency and conserving taxpayer resources."</p> <p>The Times sued in June 2021, alleging the city violated the state Public Records Act when it mishandled requests from Times reporters. The journalists had asked for copies of messages between city officials, including Durkan and former police Chief Carmen Best, on dates that overlapped with those of deleted texts.</p> <p>Reporters were trying to piece together who approved the use of tear gas against racial justice protesters, how the city handled fatal shootings in the CHOP zone, why Best later resigned and other pressing questions at the time.</p> <p>Best's texts, similar to Durkan's, were deleted from her phone and not saved elsewhere. Local governments are required to keep such text messages for at least two years.</p>

Besides failing to retain the text messages, the city withheld some records that were legally available to the public and delayed providing documents without justification, among other violations, attorney Kathy George's lawsuit alleged.

As part of the settlement with The Times, the city agreed to program all city-issued mobile phones to retain text messages permanently. It also committed to training all city employees by the end of the year on the Public Records Act and document retention. Part of the training will instruct people to not use personal phones, including for text messaging, for city business. Similar training will roll out to all elected officials by next fall.

A whistleblower in Durkan's office revealed the mayor's missing texts and a forensic investigation later showed her phone was manually reset to delete texts (though investigators couldn't determine who changed the setting).

Durkan said during a deposition with George that she dropped her phone on July 4, 2020, into a small tidepool on an undisclosed Puget Sound beach, where she had a cabin.

The day she dropped her phone, someone switched an iCloud setting to disable storing texts, according to a city-commissioned forensic analysis. Durkan said she didn't recall getting that prompt while restoring data on the broken phone, but acknowledged that nobody else handled her phone that day, after it was submerged.

Chelsea Kellogg, a spokesperson for Durkan, said that the city had recovered most of the missing texts. Along with other records, "They confirm the mayor was telling the public exactly what was happening, often in real-time," said Kellogg.

The same forensic investigation found that Best periodically deleted her own texts.

Now, the city is installing data-archiving software on city-issued phones. The settlement sets deadlines for completing installation.

The city also promised to add a "commonly requested records" section to its website for public records requests. The page will have annual pay and wage databases, audit reports, lobbyist disclosure reports, police statistics and crime maps, among other records.

One reform was particularly important for The Times, Flores said. During the discovery phase of the lawsuit, The Times learned that Durkan's communications staff held up some records that were ready to be released — for more than a month in some cases — in order to review them for "sensitive" material. State law prohibits withholding public records unless they are exempt from disclosure because they contain legally protected information.

"That was a really glaring and highly concerning practice in the Durkan administration," Flores said.

Durkan said in a deposition it was common for public records officers to "consult with whoever the subject matter expert was, to make sure that records were accurate and complete, and that there was nothing that was exempt that they may not know about."

Now, according to the settlement agreement, the city's releasing of public records can't be "unreasonably delayed because of internal review processes."

Discovery in The Times' lawsuit also revealed problems with the Seattle City Council's disclosure practices, said George. The council withheld portions of text exchanges that should've been disclosed until after the lawsuit was filed, and took 630 days to produce deleted texts that had to be reconstructed.

	<p>It also waited months to release records that Councilmembers Andrew Lewis and Alex Pedersen had quickly turned over internally, and blamed “workload” for taking months to provide Councilmember Tammy Morales with text-extraction software.</p> <p>In exchange for the city’s settlement concessions, The Times agreed to drop all legal claims stemming from the public records requests, and said it would not file additional requests for the same information. One exception: the paper reserved the right to request documents related to a fatal shooting in the CHOP, as criminal and civil cases proceed.</p> <p>In Washington, journalists and other members of the public — when they are wrongfully denied access to records — must sue to force a local government to comply. State law allows courts to award civil penalties against an agency found in violation, in addition to attorney fees.</p> <p>The city’s \$199,855 settlement will be paid from its judgment claims fund, which is supported by city utilities and the general fund. It includes \$2,800 in costs and \$87,000 in legal fees. The rest covers penalties.</p> <p>Flores said, “It’s most definitely not a good use of the public’s money. I would tell any taxpayers who are concerned about that to write or call their public officials and tell them to follow the law, so we don’t have to go to court over it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 New subvariants drive fall, winter surge?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/05/06/fall-winter-coronavirus-wave/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is warning the United States could see 100 million coronavirus infections and a potentially significant wave of deaths this fall and winter, driven by new omicron subvariants that have shown a remarkable ability to escape immunity.</p> <p>The projection, made Friday by a senior administration official during a background briefing as the nation approaches a COVID death toll of 1 million, is part of a broader push to boost the nation’s readiness and persuade lawmakers to appropriate billions of dollars to purchase a new tranche of vaccines, tests and therapeutics.</p> <p>In forecasting 100 million potential infections during a cold-weather wave later this year and early next, the official did not present new data or make a formal projection. Instead, he described the fall and winter wave as a scenario based on a range of outside models of the pandemic. Those projections assume that omicron and its subvariants will continue to dominate community spread, and there will not be a dramatically different strain of the virus, the official said, acknowledging the pandemic’s course could be altered by many factors.</p> <p>Several experts agreed that a major wave this fall and winter is possible given waning immunity from vaccines and infections, loosened restrictions and the rise of variants better able to escape immune protections all make another major wave possible.</p> <p>Many have warned that the return to more relaxed behaviors, from going maskless to participating in crowded indoor social gatherings, would lead to more infections. The seven-day national average of new infections more than doubled from 29,312 on March 30 to nearly 71,000 Friday, a little more than five weeks later.</p> <p>“What they’re saying seems reasonable — it’s on the pessimistic side of what we projected in the COVID-19 scenario modeling run,” said Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health. “It’s always hard to predict the future when it comes to COVID, but I think we’re at a point now where it’s even harder than normal. Because there’s so much sensitivity, in terms of these long-term trends, to things we don’t understand exactly about the virus and about [human] behavior,” Lessler said.</p>

Another modeler, epidemiologist Ali Mokdad of the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, said in an email Friday that a winter surge is likely. His organization, which has made long-term forecasts despite the many uncertainties, just produced a new forecast that shows a modest bump in cases through the end of May and then a decline until the arrival of winter.

The administration official said the latest forecasts are being shared with lawmakers on Capitol Hill as the White House seeks to restart stalled negotiations over appropriating more funding for the COVID response. While the White House had sought \$22.5 billion, key Senate lawmakers clinched a bipartisan deal for \$10 billion in COVID aid last month. But a dispute over the administration's decision to relax pandemic restrictions at the U.S. border upended swift passage of the deal, which has now languished for weeks.

White House officials have said they're concerned that a significant portion of the nation's supply of antivirals and tests will be exhausted as a result of an anticipated increase in cases in the South this summer. Without those tools, they say the country would be unprepared for a fall and winter surge, and deaths and hospitalizations could dramatically increase.

If Congress remains stalled, the official said, the administration would likely pull money that was set aside for more tests and therapeutics to purchase more vaccines — decisions that will leave the country more vulnerable than it should be.

The projected summer wave in the South, which would mirror similar upticks in 2020 and 2021, is particularly concerning because of the region's lower vaccination and booster rates. While deaths in the Northeast have held steady amid a sharp increase in cases in that region over the last several weeks, the South remains more vulnerable because fewer people have gotten the shots, the official said.

That forecast is echoed by outside experts. "For some reason, we see a seasonality in these peaks. We're seeing a very high rate of cases in the South during the summer months, possibly because so many people are inside because it's so hot there," said Mercedes Carnethon, epidemiologist at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

Part of the administration's challenge in responding to the pandemic is that the virus keeps mutating in ways that have sometimes surprised scientists. Omicron, most notably, emerged in southern Africa with stunning speed in November with a package of mutations and came from a different part of the virus's family tree than the delta variant it replaced. The origin of omicron remains unknown.

Omicron has since spun off many subvariants that are even more transmissible than the original strain. The BA.2 omicron subvariant continues to account for a majority of new infections in the United States, but the BA.2.12.1 subvariant is rapidly gaining ground and may soon become the most common strain. Meanwhile, two other highly transmissible variants, BA.4 and BA.5, have fueled a recent surge in infections in South Africa.

"Predicting new variants that are going to spill out — that's total guesswork," said Jeffrey Shaman, an epidemiologist at Columbia University. "Predicting that they're going to be successful, that's guesswork as well."

Another big unknown that might affect the size and severity of another wave is whether there will be more effective vaccines available by fall. Both Pfizer and Moderna are working on new booster shots that combine different versions of the coronavirus to protect against variants, but it remains unclear whether they will be more effective than existing vaccines. Administration officials said they hope they will be able to distribute such boosters in the fall, particularly to the elderly and those most at risk of severe infection and death.

Natalie Dean, a biostatistician at Emory University, said the longer the time period between COVID waves, the greater the number of people who will be vulnerable to infection because of waning immunity.

	“That just puts vulnerable people back at risk,” Dean said. “It seems likely there will continue to be these ups and downs.”
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HEADLINE	05/06 REAL ID options for WA residents
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/travel/answering-questions-real-id/281-04863621-99b4-48d4-953c-2b4e1cfb0953
GIST	<p>SEATAC, Wash. — By May 3, 2023, anyone taking a domestic flight or visiting certain federal facilities must use a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or ID card.</p> <p>"REAL ID" itself is a federal law, not a specific ID card, so there are multiple options for Washington residents to choose from. The Washington State Department of Licensing setup a website to help residents navigate the process.</p> <p>What is a REAL ID?</p> <p>There are several options that meet the residency and proof of identity requirements, including a Washington state enhanced driver's license and a passport.</p> <p>Where will I need a REAL ID compliant document?</p> <p>You will need a REAL ID compliant to fly, and you may need one to visit military bases like Joint Base Lewis-McChord. You do not need one to drive or ride a bus or train, or to visit national parks or social security offices.</p> <p>"Federal agencies, including DHS and TSA, may only accept state-issued driver's licenses and identification cards as identification for purposes of accessing federal facilities, including TSA airport security checkpoints, if the license or card was issued by a REAL ID compliant state in accordance with the REAL ID security standards (meaning the license or card must include the REAL ID compliant star marking)," according to the Department of Homeland Security. "Enhanced Driver's Licenses (EDL) issued by Washington, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and Vermont are considered acceptable alternatives to REAL ID-compliant cards and will also be accepted for official REAL ID purposes. Most EDLs do not contain the star marking and this is acceptable."</p> <p>What are the options for WA residents to be REAL ID compliant?</p> <p>Here is a full list of compliant documents, according to the Department of Homeland Security.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. passport • U.S. passport card • DHS trusted traveler cards (Global Entry, NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST) • U.S. Department of Defense ID, including IDs issued to dependents • Permanent resident card • Border crossing card • State-issued Enhanced Driver's License • An acceptable photo ID issued by a federally recognized, Tribal Nation/Indian Tribe • HSPD-12 PIV card • Foreign government-issued passport • Canadian provincial driver's license or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada card • Transportation worker identification credential • U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Employment Authorization Card (I-766) • U.S. Merchant Mariner Credential • Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) <p>"We really encourage Washington residents to start planning now and find out the type of ID that will work for you," said Washington Department of Licensing spokesperson Christine Anthony. "If you're planning to go overseas or visit a foreign country in the next five years, a passport may be your best option. If you only plan to fly domestically and you don't have a Real ID document, you may want to check into getting the enhanced driver's license or ID card."</p>

	<p>Will my normal WADOL driver's license work? A basic driver's license will not count. An enhanced driver's license will.</p> <p>Is the WADOL expecting a surge in appointments, and how can people secure one? "We have seen a slight uptick in the number of people who want to get the enhanced licensed or ID card and we certainly expect that demand to go up as we get closer to the federal deadline," Anthony said. The department of licensing options for many renewal appointments are now available online, hopefully freeing up some appointment space. But the department still advises to act on EDL appointments early, if you want one.</p> <p>There have been many delays in the past. Do I really need to get one by the deadline? The deadline is still May 3, 2023.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Bird flu detected Pacific Co. backyard flock
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/bird-flu-kills-37-million-birds-in-us-just-detected-in-washington-state-backyard-flock
GIST	<p>OMAHA, Neb. - Bird flu is killing an alarming number of bald eagles and other wild birds, with many sick birds arriving at rehabilitation centers unsteady on their talons and unable to fly.</p> <p>"It's quite a sight to see an eagle with a six-foot wingspan having uncontrollable seizures because of highly pathogenic avian influenza," said Victoria Hall, executive director of the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center. "At that point, they're so far into the disease there's no treatment options left."</p> <p>The latest outbreak of the highly contagious virus has led to the culling of about 37 million chickens and turkeys in U.S. farms since February, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has confirmed 956 cases of bird flu in wild birds, including at least 54 bald eagles. But the actual number is likely significantly higher because not every wild bird that dies is tested and the federal tally doesn't include cases recorded by wildlife rehabilitation centers.</p> <p>The latest reported toll is nearly 10 times higher than the 99 confirmed cases in wild birds during the last bird flu outbreak in 2015. This time, the virus has been detected in birds in 34 states, indicating it is far more widespread than seven years ago.</p> <p>The U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center also collects data from wildlife officials on suspected and confirmed bird flu deaths. It lists 8,536 recent wild bird deaths from avian influenza.</p> <p>"This is definitely an unprecedented event," said researcher Rebecca Poulson, who has been studying avian influenza for 15 years at the University of Georgia's Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study. "The number of birds and species and states already in which it has been detected is pretty alarming."</p> <p>Bird flu detected in Washington backyard flock The Washington State Department of Agriculture confirmed cases of bird flu (H5N1) in a non-commercial backyard flock in Pacific County, Washington.</p> <p><i>"The flock owners reported sick birds and an increased rate of mortality. Samples taken on May 4 were tested for the presence of H5N1 avian influenza virus in the flock on May 5 by state and federal labs. This is the first detection of the virus in Washington state in 2022. There are no detections in commercial poultry in the state.</i></p> <p><i>"The Washington state veterinarian quarantined the affected premise and birds on the property will be euthanized to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from the flock will not enter the food system.</i></p>

"There is no immediate public health concern due to the avian influenza virus detected. Avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat. As always, both wild and domestic poultry should be properly cooked."

Water fowl including ducks and geese, which typically carry the virus, and the raptors and scavengers that feed on them are the most commonly sickened birds, but cases have been confirmed in more than three dozen species. Ducks and geese are usually able to live with the virus without getting sick, but latest variant is proving more contagious and more deadly.

"We are seeing a tremendous impact from this virus," said Hall, whose Raptor Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, treats roughly 1,000 birds a year. "We are seeing birds coming in suffering from this virus every single day."

Nearly 61% of the 188 birds the rehabilitation center has tested since late March have had bird flu and all but one of those died. Hall said the center had to set up an area where workers wearing protective gear test sick and injured birds for avian influenza and quarantine them before bringing them into the center, to avoid infecting other birds.

None of the 114 positive cases the center has recorded, including 28 bald eagles, are included in the USDA count, Hall said. She said a great horned owl recovered from the virus, giving her hope that some wild birds may be able to fight it off.

USDA officials haven't responded to questions about why they are excluding the data from rehabilitation centers.

Scientists estimated in a [study published](#) three years ago that the number of wild birds in North America had fallen by nearly 3 billion since 1970 as humans continue to encroach on their habitat. But it's too soon to know what impact the bird flu will have on bird populations because the outbreak is ongoing and there hasn't been enough time to study it, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service veterinarian Samantha Gibbs, and other experts.

"We're quite concerned. I think that we're going to be watching very carefully what the mortality rates are throughout the spring and summer," Gibbs said.

Gibbs and Poulson said they fear the virus could survive the summer, when it usually dies off, leading to fall infections when migratory birds return south. That happened in Europe, where the virus is circulating first.

Bald eagles — the U.S. national symbol since the 1700s — are among America's most celebrated conservation success stories. With an estimated 300,000 bald eagles in the country today — a population that quadrupled between 2009 and 2021 — the bird was removed from the U.S. Endangered Species List in 2007. Given that, experts believe the species should weather the impact of this virus.

State and federal officials will track the success of nesting eagles this spring and summer to gauge the impact of the virus.

In Georgia, where three bald eagles that died tested positive for bird flu, the state Department of Natural Resources has documented a sharp drop in bald eagle reproduction this year in six coastal counties where many migratory birds spend the winter. Fewer than half of the 73 nests found there produced offspring, while nests elsewhere in the state had a success rate close to the average of 78% recorded in recent years.

Some experts, including Hall, suggest that residential bird feeders should be removed to avoid further spread of the virus, but the USDA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service haven't recommended that because bird flu isn't common among the songbirds that frequent backyards. Still, they say it's important to regularly clean bird feeders to help limit the spread of other diseases.

	<p>"Wild birds could use all the help they can get right now," Hall said.</p> <p>When the virus is found on poultry farms, officials slaughter entire flocks to curb the spread, even when most birds have no symptoms. So far, 37.36 million birds have been killed in 32 states.</p> <p>USDA officials stress that bird flu doesn't jeopardize food safety because infected birds aren't allowed to enter the food supply, and properly cooking poultry and eggs to 165 degrees Fahrenheit will kill any viruses or bacteria.</p> <p>Health officials also say bird flu doesn't represent a significant health risk to people, even though one human case of the disease was confirmed in Colorado last month. Officials say people are unlikely to catch the virus unless they have prolonged direct exposure to infected birds.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 SPD union: city underreporting officer loss
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/spd-union-president-city-underreporting-officer-loss-alternative-policing-needs-collective-bargaining
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The president of the union representing Seattle police officers says the city is not being "accurate" with the public about the rate depletion rate of officers leaving the department and warned any "alternative policing" model is subject to collective bargaining.</p> <p>Seattle Police Officer's Guild (SPOG) President Mike Solan tells FOX 13 that the true number of officers that have left the department in the first four months of the year is 59.</p> <p>During an April 26 committee meeting with Seattle City Council members, Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz said that number was 43, not 59. He also said that had been 13 new hires in 2022.</p> <p>Seattle Police has budget approvals to hire 125 new officers in 2022, but Diaz told the council that he's projecting 98 hires in 2022. Solan says his information indicates there will likely be 50 new hires.</p> <p>"I'm not sure that our community is being told accurate numbers outside of what SPOG is providing," Solan said.</p> <p>He said his information indicates the department will lose 173 officers this year. Seattle Police had been estimating 125 that will leave the department.</p> <p>"Our public needs to be informed on how desperate we are to continue providing 911 service, just on a basic level," Solan said.</p> <p>FOX 13 sent an outline of Solan's comments and numbers to the office of Mayor Bruce Harrell and Council Member Lisa Herbold, who chairs the Public Safety Committee that oversees SPD policies. We have not heard a response.</p> <p>The timing of Solan's comments comes before several important votes next week by Herbold's committee.</p> <p>The city estimates a salary savings between \$4.1 to \$4.5 million because the SPD won't hit its hiring goal of 125 officers. That number could be higher if SPOG's hiring projections are accurate.</p> <p>The Council committee will consider a resolution by Council Member Sara Nelson to use the savings to fund hiring and retention incentives for SPD. Herbold is offering a proposal to use \$635,000 to fund moving costs for officers who are hired.</p> <p>The negotiations between council members and the Mayor's office have been going on all week and could result in a proposal that would be acceptable to all sides.</p>

Harrell has been on the sidelines during the weeks-long debate on hiring and retention bonuses. A possible incentive plan could be made public in early summer.

His spokesperson, Jamie Housen, said Harrell will provide details of his own plan by early summer and it "will want to draw from SPD underspend."

During the April 26 meeting, Council Member Teresa Mosqueda expressed an intent to hold the salary savings over into the 2023 budget for other uses, citing data that showed hiring incentives may or may not work.

"I have questions about using critical public resources for a possible investment in a policy that has not yet been proven," she said.

"I think some of this is political," Solan said about the city's providing "accurate" numbers on SPD's depletion rate.

"That's why we would try to circumvent politics and give the community accurate, non-political numbers so they really understand how serious this situation is," he said.

Solan also said "alternative policing" that many members of the City Council and the Mayor have talked about may be subject to collective bargaining.

"The reality is there is no definition outside of saying, 'we want an alternative to armed response,'" he said. "That's OK, but now we are getting into the waters of body of work from the union perspective."

A new development that could lengthen contract negotiations is now underway between SPOG and the City of Seattle.

Solan says duties that historically have been performed by patrol officers that would go to someone else should be part of the bargaining process.

"We are more than willing to sit down with the City and bargain what alternative forms of policing looks like when you compare it to the history of work of the police officers of this union," he said.

Housen said the Mayor's Office "cannot discuss specific bargaining elements of SPOG negotiations as they are ongoing."

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/06 GAO: open source data prior to Jan 6 riot
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/gao-federal-agencies-had-open-source-data-on-potential-violence-prior-to-capitol-attack/
GIST	<p>The Government Accountability Office (GAO) says federal agencies obtained and shared social media posts and other publicly available information (open source data) on potential criminal activity prior to January 6, 2021.</p> <p>GAO issued a sensitive report in February regarding open source data in relation to the January 6 attack on the Capitol. It has now shared some of this information publicly.</p> <p>All 10 of the agencies that GAO reviewed—including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis who have lead roles in</p>

countering domestic terrorism and violent extremism—were aware of open source data about planned events on January 6, and seven were aware of potential violence planned for that day.

Local agencies also had roles in assessing and sharing information and coordinating with federal agencies related to January 6.

GAO found the 10 federal agencies obtained the data through manual web searches, sharing with each other, and social media platforms. Facebook and Parler representatives told the government watchdog that the platforms shared information with “a federal agency” regarding potential violence at the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

Prior to January 6, the FBI reviewed information regarding an online threat that discussed calls for violence, including “Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood...Get violent...Go there ready for war.” In addition, in mid-December 2020, DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis received information regarding threats to Congress and elected officials and discussions of bringing guns into D.C. on January 6. Further, one agency received data from a social media platform on December 24, 2020, that included a user threatening to kill politicians and coordinate armed forces on January 6.

Seven of the 10 agencies reviewed developed 38 election-related threat products based partly on open source data to inform security planning. Twenty-six of those were about planned events for January 6. Of those, the FBI prepared one and DHS prepared two threat products.

The 26 products included these threats:

- Potential for violence between opposing groups. Six agencies identified that violence could occur if opposing groups came into contact.
- Groups or individuals may be armed. Five agencies identified that individuals or groups planned to attend events while armed.
- Groups or individuals may use improvised weapons. Three agencies identified that individuals may use weapons, such as explosives.
- Extremist groups may commit or incite violence. Seven agencies identified that extremists could incite violence at demonstrations.
- Groups may attack the Capitol or Congress. Two agencies identified the Capitol or Congress as targets of violent attacks based on election results.

This report, which was made public in part on May 2 is the fifth in a series of GAO reports on aspects of the Capitol attack. The watchdog’s planned final report in the series will assess the extent to which agencies shared and used threat-related information, including open source data, to prepare security measures for the events of January 6.

In March, [a report](#) by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) at DHS said that inexperienced open source data collectors at the Office of Intelligence and Analysis were unsure about when information should be reported and were critical of the training they had received.

OIG’s review found that Intelligence and Analysis did email threat information to its local partners in the Washington, D.C. area on several occasions before the events at the U.S. Capitol. This would tie in with GAO’s findings that federal agencies did indeed share information. However, OIG found that this data was not as widely disseminated as typical intelligence products. It set out several recommendations for DHS, which the agency is working to complete by July.

GAO’s final report will likely fill in the remaining gaps and reveal any deficiencies that still need to be weeded out in order to improve how open source data is used as vital intelligence to prevent future attacks.

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[Read the full report at GAO](#)

SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/crypto-mixer-blender-sanctioned-by-us-treasury-for-involvement-in-600m-ronin-theft/
GIST	<p>The United States Treasury has hit cryptocurrency mixing service Blender.io with sanctions, preventing transactions with US persons, off the back of it providing services for the attackers that made off with \$600 million from the Ronin sidechain in March.</p> <p>Last month, Treasury said the theft was conducted by the North Korean Lazarus group, which it first sanctioned in 2019, and updated its listed cryptocurrency addresses at that time, and again on Friday.</p> <p>After the attack, Blender was used to process \$20.5 million.</p> <p>"For the first time ever, Treasury is sanctioning a virtual currency mixer," Under Secretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence Brian Nelson said.</p> <p>"Virtual currency mixers that assist illicit transactions pose a threat to US national security interests. We are taking action against illicit financial activity by the DPRK and will not allow state-sponsored thievery and its money-laundering enablers to go unanswered."</p> <p>Treasury added that Blender was also involved in laundering for Russian-linked ransomware groups including Trickbot, Conti, Ryuk, Sodinokibi, and Gandcrab.</p> <p>"Blender.io is a virtual currency mixer that operates on the Bitcoin blockchain and indiscriminately facilitates illicit transactions by obfuscating their origin, destination, and counterparties. Blender receives a variety of transactions and mixes them together before transmitting them to their ultimate destinations," Treasury said.</p> <p>"While the purported purpose is to increase privacy, mixers like Blender are commonly used by illicit actors."</p> <p>The sanctions mean any Blender or majority Blender-owned property that is in the US must be reported, and all transaction by Americans within the US are blocked unless a licence to do so is issued. The sanctions cover funds, goods, and services.</p> <p>The attack on the Ronin sidechain garnered 173,600 in Ethereum and 25.5 million in US coin, which was only noticed a week later. Ronin was announced in mid-2020 by play-to-earn game Axie Infinity created by Vietnamese blockchain game maker Sky Mavis as a way to overcome Ethereum network congestion.</p> <p>For the attack to occur, the attacker gained control of the four validators operated by Sky Mavis, and one operated by Axie DAO.</p> <p>In a post mortem, the company conceded it did not have a proper tracking system in place. The replacement system will involve human interaction for large amounts, it said.</p> <p>Through a combination of spear-phishing, and an allowlist on the Axie DAO validator not being removed, Lazarus was able to take control of the sidechain.</p> <p>The sidechain is having its number of validators increased, with a goal of 21 in three months, and a long-term one of 100 validators.</p> <p>It added the Ronin bridge should reopen in mid to late May, and that all user funds were being restored.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Ukraine CERT warns: new wave of attacks
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/ukrainian-cert-warns-citizens-of-new.html

GIST	<p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) has warned of phishing attacks that deploy an information-stealing malware called Jester Stealer on compromised systems.</p> <p>The mass email campaign carries the subject line "chemical attack" and contains a link to a macro-enabled Microsoft Excel file, opening which leads to computers getting infected with Jester Stealer.</p> <p>The attack, which requires potential victims to enable macros after opening the document, works by downloading and executing an .EXE file that is retrieved from compromised web resources, CERT-UA detailed.</p> <p>Jester Stealer, which was first documented by Cyble in February 2022, comes with features to steal and transmit login credentials, cookies, and credit card information along with data from passwords managers, chat messengers, email clients, crypto wallets, and gaming apps to the attackers.</p> <p>"The hackers get the stolen data via Telegram using statically configured proxy addresses (e.g., within TOR)," the agency said. "They also use anti-analysis techniques (anti-VM/debug/sandbox). The malware has no persistence mechanism — it is deleted as soon as its operation is completed."</p> <p>The Jester Stealer campaign coincides with another phishing attack that CERT-UA has attributed to the Russian nation-state actor tracked as APT28 (aka Fancy Bear aka Strontium).</p> <p>The emails, titled "Кибератака" (meaning cyberattack in Ukrainian), masquerade as a security notification from CERT-UA and come with a RAR archive file "UkrScanner.rar" attachment that, when opened, deploys a malware called CredoMap_v2.</p> <p>"Unlike prior versions of this stealer malware, this one uses the HTTP protocol for data exfiltration," CERT-UA noted. "Stolen authentication data will be sent to a web resource, deployed on the Pipedream platform, through the HTTP POST requests."</p> <p>The disclosures follow similar findings from Microsoft's Digital Security Unit (DSU) and Google's Threat Analysis Group (TAG) about Russian state-sponsored hacking crews carrying out credential and data theft operations in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Ransomware groups still eye healthcare
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/ransomware-groups-keep-healthcare-in-sights-selling-access-on-the-dark-web
GIST	<p>Data from the Department of Health and Human Services Cybersecurity Program shows the rate of initial access brokers selling access to healthcare networks to ransomware groups and affiliates has remained constant from the end of 2021 through the first half of the year.</p> <p>The new HC3 report on ransomware trends for 2022 so far confirms the sale of access to global healthcare entities on dark web forums has also remained consistent during the assessed time period. The concern is that the brokers are further enabling ransomware-as-a-service groups to focus more on the development of payloads and coordinate operations with affiliates.</p> <p>In total, VPN and RDP access accounted for more than half of these forum advertisements, followed by compromised Citrix VPN appliances with 23% of the overall total. With a total of 0.07% each, Fortinet, RDWEB, and PulseSecure make up the remaining healthcare access list.</p> <p>The report notes this targeting is likely tied to the accelerated adoption of remote access and cloud applications brought on to support the COVID-19 pandemic response, as often these access points were adopted without the implementation of basic security tools.</p>

HC3 also outlined the three leading ransomware trends seen in 2022, so far. Healthcare entities should review these elements to better understand prioritization needs across the enterprise.

The primary ransomware actors targeting the healthcare sector are [LockBit 2.0](#) and Conti, each with 31% of the total global healthcare attacks in H1 2022. Suncrypt accounted for 16% of the attacks, followed by ALPHV and Hive, both with 11% of the total attacks.

Most notably, [Conti](#) was behind the massive [Ireland Health Service Executive attack](#) in the summer of 2021, which left the country's healthcare system offline for several months in the midst of a COVID-19 surge. The initial cost estimates reached more than \$600 million.

The HC3 alert also warns that two financially motivated groups have shifted into ransomware operations. [F1N7 began the shift](#) at the end of last year and are tied to Maze, Ryuk, and one of the latest operators, [ALPHV/BlackCat](#), while April 2022 reports show that "ransomware attacks conducted by [FIN12 could reportedly be achieved in less than two days](#), compared to the previous timeframe of five days, when the group was first identified."

[FIN12 has specifically targeted the healthcare industry](#), leveraging Ryuk, Beacon, SystemBC, and Metasploit variants and is behind "some of the most prolific intrusions seen throughout 2021."

Legitimate tools increasingly used by ransomware groups to avoid detection

Lastly, ransomware groups are increasingly using legitimate tools during ransomware intrusions to evade detection, including remote access, encryption, file transfer, and open-source tools. In these, "living off the land" attacks, hackers use tools from the targeted environment instead of deploying customized tools and malware, enabling their actions to blend in with normal tasks.

The HC3 report contains a full list of the commonly leveraged tools, as well as the relevant detection opportunities and ATT&CK techniques.

Although there have been far fewer ransomware-related disruptions reported in the U.S. sector this year, so far, the report confirms that hackers are continuing to work behind the scenes for future nefarious activities. As such, HC3 is urging sector leaders to employ recommended mitigations, including reducing the attack surface and disabling certain, unnecessary functions.

"Financially motivated and state-sponsored threat actors are highly likely to continue to evolve their tactics," the report authors wrote. "Living off the Land (LotL) techniques leveraging legitimate tools are difficult but possible to detect." Using a behavior-based approach, "a modern security information and event management (SIEM) tool can detect these techniques."

And although some types of attacks can't be easily mitigated with preventative measures given the "abuse of system features, there are detection opportunities for these techniques," they added.

Fortunately, the healthcare sector has a long list of resources to pull from that can support best practice mitigation of the leading ransomware threats, including those from [HHS](#), [Mitre](#), and the [Health Sector Coordinating Council's Cybersecurity Working Group](#).

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HEADLINE	05/06 Tech giants join effort to scrap passwords
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/tech-giants-unite-effort-scrap-passwords
GIST	In celebration of 2022 Word Password Day, Apple, Google and Microsoft announced plans to expand support for a sign-in standard from the FIDO alliance and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) that aims to eliminate passwords altogether.

The passwordless sign-in involves the use of a FIDO credential called passkey, which is stored on a phone. When signing into a website, users would need to have their phone nearby, as they will have to unlock it for access.

“Once you’ve done this, you won’t need your phone again and you can sign in by just unlocking your computer. Even if you lose your phone, your passkeys will securely sync to your new phone from cloud backup, allowing you to pick up right where your old device left off,” [Google](#) explains.

As Microsoft points out, with more than 921 password attacks every second, the wide adoption of common passwordless standards would mean cutting off the supply of passwords for attackers.

“Passkeys are a safer, faster, easier replacement for your password. With passkeys, you can sign in to any supported website or application by simply verifying your face, fingerprint or using a device PIN. Passkeys are fast, phish-resistant, and will be supported across leading devices and platforms,” the tech giant [noted](#).

According to the FIDO alliance, the use of passwords for authentication is a big security issue across the web, mainly because many users often reuse the same password across services, which could lead to data breaches, account takeovers, and identity theft.

While password managers and the use of two-factor authentication improve the security of accounts, the new common standard is meant to ensure that users receive consistent, secure and passwordless sign-ins across websites and applications, regardless of the devices they use.

The FIDO Alliance and the W3C worked together with hundreds of tech companies globally to create the passwordless sign-in standards, which already enjoy support on billions of devices, as well as modern web browsers.

The Alliance also notes that Apple, Google, and Microsoft have led the development of the standards and are now in the process of expanding support for the passwordless sign-ins into their respective platforms.

“Working with the industry to establish new, more secure sign-in methods that offer better protection and eliminate the vulnerabilities of passwords is central to our commitment to building products that offer maximum security and a transparent user experience — all with the goal of keeping users’ personal information safe,” Kurt Knight, Apple senior director of platform product marketing, said.

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HEADLINE	05/09 Anonymous claims hack Russia giant Qiwi
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-nb65-hacki-russia-payment-processor-qiwi/
GIST	<p>The Anonymous affiliated Network Battalion aka NB65 group has allegedly targeted a Russian payment processing platform Qiwi and leaked 7 million payment card data as proof of hack.</p> <p>On May 1st, 2022, NB65, one of the Anonymous affiliate hacktivist groups published a tweet in which it claimed to have gained access to Qiwi’s databases for operation OpRussia. For your information, QIWI plc is a Russian giant that provides payment and financial services in Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.</p> <p>It is worth noting that NB65 is the same group that had hacked Russian state-run television and radio broadcaster VGTRK aka All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company in April 2022 and leaked 786GB worth of data online.</p> <p>As for the attack on Qiwi, NB65 also tweeted that it managed to extract 10.5TB of data comprising 30 million payment records and filtered 12.5 million credit cards of Qiwi customers. The group also posted a statement revealing that the attack was aimed at disrupting the Russian financial system.</p>

NB65 also stated that they encrypted the platform's networks with a ransomware kit. Furthermore, the group threatened to release one million records every day after the 3-day contract period expires, and the platform fails to reach out to them.

Qiwi Denies Hacking Claim

In a statement to TASS Russian News Agency, Qiwi denied the claim that NB65 hacked the platform. The company also said that its payment services are functioning normally, and customer data is also safe.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Caramel credit card stealing service popular
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/caramel-credit-card-stealing-service-is-growing-in-popularity/
GIST	<p>A credit card stealing service is growing in popularity, allowing any low-skilled threat actors an easy and automated way to get started in the world of financial fraud.</p> <p>Credit card skimmers are malicious scripts that are injected into hacked e-commerce websites that quietly wait for customers to make a purchase on the site.</p> <p>Once a purchase is made, these malicious scripts steal the credit card details and send them back to remote servers to be collected by threat actors.</p> <p>Threat actors then use these cards to make their own online purchases or sell the credit card details on dark web marketplaces to other threat actors for as little as a few dollars.</p> <p>The Caramel skimmer-as-a-service</p> <p>The new service was discovered by Domain Tools, which states that the platform is operated by a Russian cybercrime organization named "CaramelCorp."</p> <p>This service supplies subscribers with a skimmer script, deployment instructions, and a campaign management panel, which is everything a threat actor needs to launch their own credit card stealing campaign.</p> <p>The Caramel service only sells to Russian-speaking threat actors, using an initial vetting process that excludes those using machine translation or are inexperienced in this field.</p> <p>A lifetime subscription costs \$2,000, which is not cheap for budding threat actors, but promises Russian-speaking hackers full customer support, code upgrades, and evolving anti-detection measures.</p> <p>The sellers make unverified claims that Caramel can bypass protection services from Cloudflare, Akamai, Incapsula, and others.</p> <p>The buyers are provided with a "quick start" guide on JavaScript methods that work particularly well in specific CMS (content management systems).</p> <p>As the credit card skimming scripts are written in JavaScript, Caramel offers subscribers a variety of obfuscation techniques to prevent them from being easily detected.</p> <p>The credit card data collection is done through the "setInterval()" method, which exfiltrates data between fixed periods. While this doesn't seem like an effective method, it can help steal details of even abandoned carts and incomplete purchases.</p> <p>Finally, the administration of the campaigns is done through a panel where the subscriber can oversee the compromised e-shops, manage the gateways for the reception of the stolen data, and more.</p> <p>Operating since 2020</p>

	<p>Skimming campaigns aren't new, and neither is Caramel. Bleeping Computer was able to find the first dark web posts offering the kit for purchase back in December 2020.</p> <p>However, continuous development and promotion have helped Caramel grow more popular in the underground community.</p> <p>The existence of Caramel and other skimming services of this kind removes the technical barrier to setting up and operating large-scale card skimming campaigns, potentially making skimmer campaigns even more common.</p> <p>For customers of e-commerce platforms, you can protect yourself from credit card skimmers by using one-time private cards, setting up charging limits and restrictions, or just using online payment systems instead of cards.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Costa Rica declares national emergency
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/costa-rica-declares-national-emergency-after-conti-ransomware-attacks/
GIST	<p>The Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves has declared a national emergency following cyber attacks from Conti ransomware group on multiple government bodies.</p> <p>BleepingComputer also observed Conti published most of the 672 GB dump that appears to contain data belonging to the Costa Rican government agencies.</p> <p>The declaration was signed into law by Chaves on Sunday, May 8th, same day as the economist and former Minister of Finance effectively became the country's 49th and current president.</p> <p>Costa Rica under national emergency after cyberattacks</p> <p>On Sunday, May 8th, the newly elected Costa Rican President Chaves declared a national emergency citing ongoing Conti ransomware attacks as the reason.</p> <p>Conti ransomware had originally claimed ransomware attack against Costa Rican government entities last month.</p> <p>The country's public health agency Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) had earlier stated that "a perimeter security review is being carried out on the Conti Ransomware, to verify and prevent possible attacks at the CCSS level."</p> <p>BleepingComputer observed that as of yesterday Conti's data leak site had been updated to state that the group had leaked 97% of the 672 GB data dump allegedly containing information stolen from government agencies...</p> <p>The public body that first suffered damage from Conti's cyberattack is the Ministry of Finance which still has not yet fully evaluated the scope of the security incident or to what extent has taxpayers' information, payments, and customs systems have been impacted.</p> <p>Conti earlier demanded a \$10 million ransom from the Ministry which the government declined to pay. Conti's leak site presently lists the following government purportedly affected by the attack, as seen by BleepingComputer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Costa Rican Finance Minsitry, Ministerio de Hacienda • The Ministry of Labor and Social Security, MTSS • The Social Development and Family Allowances Fund, FODESAF • The Interuniversity Headquarters of Alajuela, SIUA

BleepingComputer has not yet analyzed the leaked data but a preliminary analysis of a very small subset of the leaked data shows source code and SQL databases that appears to be from government websites.

Rather than attributing this cyberattack to nation-state hackers, Conti threat actor "UNC1756," along with their affiliate, has solely claimed responsibility for it. The threat actor has threatened to conduct future attacks of "a more serious form."

News outlet [Amelia Rueda](#) that earlier [reported](#) on the development states the execute decree No. 42542 from the President establishes an emergency:

"The attack that Costa Rica is suffering from cybercriminals, cyberterrorists is declared a national emergency and we are signing this decree, precisely, to declare a state of national emergency in the entire public sector of the Costa Rican State and allow our society to respond to these attacks as criminal acts," said the President, accompanied by Minister of the Presidency, Natalia Díaz, and the Minister of Science, Innovation, Technology and Telecommunications (Micitt), Carlos Alvarado.

Since April 18th, the Treasury's digital services have been unavailable which is affecting the entire "productive sector" due to government procedures, signatures, and stamps having been disrupted, reports, [Amelia Rueda](#).

"We signed the decree so that the country can defend itself from the criminal attack that cybercriminals are making us. That is an attack on the Homeland and we signed the decree to have a better way of defending ourselves," added President Chaves.

Other agencies to have been impacted by Conti's attacks include:

- Administrative Board of the Electrical Service of the province of Cartago (Jasec)
- The Ministry of Science, Innovation, Technology, and Telecommunications
- National Meteorological Institute (IMN)
- Radiographic Costarricense (Racsa)
- Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS).

As reported by BleepingComputer last week, the U.S. government is [rewarding up to \\$15 million](#) to anyone providing information that can lead to the identification and arrests of Conti ransomware's leadership and operators.

The U.S. Department of State pledged to offer up to \$10 million for information on the identity and location of the threat actors with an additional \$5 million bounty for leading to the arrest and/or convictions of the individuals responsible for these attacks.

Conti ransomware group in review

[Conti](#) is a Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) operation linked to the Russian-speaking [Wizard Spider](#) cybercrime group (also known for other notorious malware, including Ryuk, TrickBot, and BazarLoader).

The cybercrime gang's victims include Ireland's [Health Service Executive](#) (HSE) and its [Department of Health \(DoH\)](#), asking the former to pay a [\\$20 million ransom](#).

The FBI also warned in May 2021 that Conti operators tried to breach over [a dozen US healthcare and first responder organizations](#).

In August 2021, [a disgruntled affiliate leaked Conti's training materials](#), including info on one of its operators, a manual on deploying various malicious tools, and numerous help documents allegedly provided to the group's affiliates.

According to analysts from multiple cybersecurity firms, Conti is now managing various side businesses meant to sustain its ransomware operations or pay for initial network access when needed.

	One such side operation is the recently emerged Karakurt data extortion group, active since at least June 2021 and recently linked to Conti by researchers from Advanced Intelligence, Infinitum, Arctic Wolf, Northwave, and Chainalysis, as the cybercrime gang's data extortion arm.
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HEADLINE	05/07 US: \$15M reward for info Conti gang
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-offers-15-million-reward-for-info-on-conti-ransomware-gang/
GIST	<p>The US Department of State is offering up to \$15 million for information that helps identify and locate leadership and co-conspirators of the infamous Conti ransomware gang.</p> <p>Up to \$10 million of this reward are offered for info on Conti leaders' identity and location, and an additional \$5 million for leading to the arrest and/or convictions of individuals who conspired or attempted to participate in Conti ransomware attacks.</p> <p>According to a statement issued by State Department spokesman Ned Price, Conti has hit more than 1,000 victims who paid over \$150 million in ransoms until January 2022.</p> <p>"The Conti ransomware group has been responsible for hundreds of ransomware incidents over the past two years," Price said Friday.</p> <p>"The FBI estimates that as of January 2022, there had been over 1,000 victims of attacks associated with Conti ransomware with victim payouts exceeding \$150,000,000, making the Conti Ransomware variant the costliest strain of ransomware ever documented."</p> <p>In November, the US State Department has also offered rewards of up to \$15 million for information on the REvil (Sodinokibi) and Darkside ransomware operations.</p> <p>The rewards are offered as part of the Department of State's Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program (TOCRP). Since 1986, the Department has paid over \$135 million in rewards under this program.</p> <p>Those who can provide this information can submit tips to the FBI at https://tips.fbi.gov or using the FBI's Electronic Tip Form.</p> <p>The Conti ransomware group Conti is a Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) operation linked to the Russian-speaking Wizard Spider cybercrime group (also known for other notorious malware, including Ryuk, TrickBot, and BazarLoader).</p> <p>The cybercrime gang's victims include Ireland's Health Service Executive (HSE) and its Department of Health (DoH), asking the former to pay a \$20 million ransom.</p> <p>The FBI also warned in May 2021 that Conti operators tried to breach over a dozen US healthcare and first responder organizations.</p> <p>In August 2021, a disgruntled affiliate leaked Conti's training materials, including info on one of its operators, a manual on deploying various malicious tools, and numerous help documents allegedly provided to the group's affiliates.</p> <p>According to analysts from multiple cybersecurity firms, Conti is now managing various side businesses meant to sustain its ransomware operations or pay for initial network access when needed.</p> <p>One such side operation is the recently emerged Karakurt data extortion group, active since at least June 2021 and recently linked to Conti by researchers from Advanced Intelligence, Infinitum, Arctic Wolf, Northwave, and Chainalysis, as the cybercrime gang's data extortion arm.</p>

HEADLINE	05/07 BPFDoor: active Chinese surveillance tool
SOURCE	https://doublepulsar.com/bpfdoor-an-active-chinese-global-surveillance-tool-54b078f1a896
GIST	<p>Recently, PwC Threat Intelligence documented the existence of BPFDoor, a passive network implant for Linux they attribute to Red Menshen, a Chinese threat actor group.</p> <p>PFDDoor is interesting. It allows a threat actor to backdoor a system for remote code execution, without opening any new network ports or firewall rules. For example, if a webapp exists on port 443, it can listen and react on the existing port 443, and the implant can be reached over the webapp port (even with the webapp running). This is because it uses a BPF packet filter.</p> <p>Operators have access to a tool which allows communication to the implants, using a password, which allows features such as remotely executing commands. This works over internal and internet networks.</p> <p>Because BPFDoor doesn't open any inbound network ports, doesn't use an outbound C2, and it renames its own process in Linux (so ps aux, for example, will show a friendly name) it is highly evasive.</p> <p>I swept the internet for BPFDoor throughout 2021, and discovered it is installed at organisations in across the globe— in particular the US, South Korea, Hong Kong, Turkey, India, Viet Nam and Myanmar, and is highly evasive. These organisations include government systems, postal and logistic systems, education systems and more.</p> <p>Inside those organisations I believe it is likely present on thousands of systems. The implant appears to be for surveillance purposes.</p> <p>Per PwC:</p> <p><i>We also identified that the threat actor sends commands to BPFDoor victims via Virtual Private Servers (VPSs) hosted at a well-known provider, and that these VPSs, in turn, are administered via compromised routers based in Taiwan, which the threat actor uses as VPN tunnels. Most Red Menshen activity that we observed took place between Monday to Friday (with none observed on the weekends), with most communication taking place between 01:00 and 10:00 UTC. This pattern suggests a consistent 8 to 9-hour activity window for the threat actor, with realistic probability of it aligning to local working hours.</i></p> <p>The implant has been in use for many years — over 5 — and has flown under the radar.</p>
Return to Top	You can read more in PwC's great, yearly threat intelligence brief, here .

HEADLINE	05/08 Crypto prices slump over the weekend
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/crypto-prices-slump-over-weekend-11652011356?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos4
GIST	<p>The cryptocurrency market fell over the weekend, mirroring the slide of the broader stock market.</p> <p>The world's largest cryptocurrency, bitcoin, fell to \$34,656 on Sunday afternoon, a 3.9% drop from Friday evening, according to prices from CoinDesk. Earlier in the afternoon, bitcoin slid below \$34,000 to about half of its all-time-high of \$67,802 in November.</p> <p>Ethereum, the second-largest cryptocurrency, had a price Sunday afternoon of about \$2,565, a 5.1% decline from Friday at 5 p.m. EDT.</p> <p>Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies more widely are known for their violent price swings. Individual investors controlled the market for years but institutional investors, such as hedge funds and money managers, have started to dominate it.</p>

	<p>With more professional investors trading crypto, the market has increasingly moved in tandem with traditional markets. Many institutional investors that buy cryptocurrencies treat them as risk assets, similar to tech stocks. Investors tend to retreat to safer corners of the market during turbulent bouts.</p> <p>The stock market dropped last week the day after the Federal Reserve announced a rate increase of a half point, the biggest since 2000, to battle inflation. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said there could be additional increases in the summer. The central bank is also unwinding some of its \$9 trillion asset portfolio.</p> <p>The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite hit a 52-week low Friday, falling to 12144.66. Year to date, it is down 22%.</p> <p>Crypto prices have been stagnant for much of 2022 as investors started bracing for rising interest rates. The crypto market was active over the weekend, with \$112 billion in market volume in a 24-hour period, according to CoinMarketCap. The global crypto market is now \$1.59 trillion.</p> <p>Cryptocurrency companies have been working to become household names. Flush with venture-capital investment, crypto platforms have been spending more cash on lobbying efforts and marketing directly to consumers.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Virtual land rush in metaverse: costs rising
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metaverse-real-estate-companies-land-rush/
GIST	<p>Spurred by fear of missing out on the next big thing, large corporations and institutional investors are gobbling up choice digital real estate, with virtual parcels being bought up almost faster than the environments can be created.</p> <p>Prices for space in the connected virtual- and augmented-reality environments known as the metaverse shot up last year, with sales of digital property hitting \$500 million. The trend could make the virtual real estate industry a \$5 billion market by 2026.</p> <p>Many businesses see digital real estate as an opportunity to market their brands and engage with customers. But some observers say the flood of capital, along with bullish forecasts about financial opportunities in the metaverse, indicate a bubble.</p> <p>"The value of virtual real estate, which is not zero in the long term, is certainly hyped and inflated right now by this frenzy of interest that is perhaps out in front of what the technology can actually deliver," Philip Rosedale, the founder of Second Life, a multimedia online world where users can also buy virtual land, told CBS News.</p> <p>"We have to cross a really big chasm, and that chasm is from what young kids are doing and willing to do in multiplayer games to grownups wanting to be together socially in a virtual environment," Rosedale said. "And we're a lot farther from that than a lot of the enthusiastic folks in the market think right now."</p> <p>Big brands stake their claim</p> <p>While a fully operational virtual world where adults can socialize and engage with companies is still years away, more than 200 consumer-facing brands, including Gucci, Atari, Wari Music Group and HSBC, have already purchased virtual land in the metaverse.</p> <p>"The utility of virtual land is real," said Sebastien Borget, co-founder and COO of The Sandbox, one of four major platforms that deals in digital real estate. The three other major platforms in meta real estate include Decentraland, Somnium Space and Cryptovoxels, together they own nearly 269,000 parcels of digital real estate.</p> <p>"The possibilities are tremendous because there's no more limits to physics, to imagination, and it makes sense because users want to engage more profoundly with the brand community," he added.</p>

Many companies are using the virtual land to create new marketing channels through immersive experiences, digital goods like NFTs and sponsored content. Borget said "brands will want to be closest to where the users are to keep engaging with them."

Yet that crucial first step — buying prime real estate in the metaverse — is getting increasingly expensive.

According to a report from RepublicRealm, which tracks metaverse-related projects, the average price for a parcel of land across the four major platforms doubled to \$12,000 during a six-month period last year.

Just like in the real world, location on the map can significantly impact property prices in the metaverse. A plot of land next to rapper Snoop Dog's virtual real estate in Sandbox [reportedly sold for \\$450,000](#) in December. Other factors that impact the value of real estate in the metaverse [include](#) parcel size and the popularity of the metaverse platform on which you choose to build.

The hype is drawing in plenty of new users as well as creating renewed demand for crypto wallets. In these virtual spaces, crypto coins are the main currency for transactions, making access to a crypto wallet — a space where converted dollars are stored — essential for participation.

Of the more than 2.5 million registered crypto wallets on The Sandbox, half belong to users who created a wallet for the first time when signing up for the platform, the company said.

Of the roughly 166,000 parcels of real estate in Sandbox, roughly 70% have already been sold to more than 20,000 people, Borget said. In terms of size, a single parcel in the Sandbox is the equivalent of buildable space in the real world measuring 315 feet long and 315 feet wide with 420 feet of height in the real world. Each platform offers varying sizes of parcels that range from 50 square feet to over 400 square feet.

Big money piling in

The growing hype is quickly drawing institutional investors to the virtual space.

In January, professional services company PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), purchased virtual real estate from Sandbox. Last month, HSBC, one of the world's largest financial institutions, also bought virtual land and followed it up by starting a fund to capture investment opportunities in the metaverse.

"We see great potential to create new experiences through emerging platforms," Suresh Balaji, chief marketing officer at HSBC, Asia-Pacific, said in a statement, adding that it's a branding opportunity for HSBC to engage new and existing customers.

In addition to The Sandbox, other platforms like Decentraland, Somnium Space, and Cryptovoxels also offer plots of digital land that can be used to build virtual experiences.

\$1 trillion market

JP Morgan, which recently said "the opportunities presented by interactive, digital worlds seem limitless," purchased virtual real estate in Decentraland. The global banking company estimates that the metaverse market will soon generate over \$1 trillion in yearly revenue and that monetary risks for businesses that jump in early are relatively low.

"The astronomical risk of being left behind is worth the incremental investment needed to get started and explore this new digital landscape for yourself," JPMorgan wrote in a [January report](#), adding that virtual real estate gives corporations opportunities to "massively scale."

"Instead of having stores in every city, a major retailer might build a global hub in the metaverse that is able to serve millions of customers," JPMorgan said.

That's one strategy that Prager Metis, a large accounting firm, is looking to deploy. Prager Metis recently purchased virtual real estate in Decentraland and is in the process of opening a three-story digital building that will serve as its metaverse headquarters.

The company appointed Jerry Eitel, an accountant with over 40 years of experience who also leads the firm's real estate practice, as its Chief Metaverse Officer. His job is to help businesses and individuals navigate the financial challenges of the metaverse real-estate market.

"We're developing a consulting practice around this," Eitel told CBS News. "Look what the internet did years ago, it disrupted so many industries, and this is going to do the same."

Technical and ethical wrinkles

The current virtual land rush notwithstanding, digital real estate is not a new concept, but goes back nearly two decades. Users can also buy land on the popular multiplayer online platform Second Life, which first launched in 2003.

Founder Rosedale said Second Life has an economy of \$650 million a year, but the average transaction is \$2. That "gives you an indication of what we're going to see in the long-term as to the value of virtual goods," he said.

In addition to cautious optimism about the future value of virtual land, Rosedale noted current challenges that platforms have to address in order to scale. One issue is getting a lot of user avatars together in the same place at the same time, he explained, adding that Second Life has only been able to get 100 users together in one place.

He also warned of potential nightmares if advertising becomes the main method of making money in virtual space.

"If the virtual worlds use advertising as a way of monetizing themselves, they're very, very likely to do great harm to people," Rosedale said. He added that body and eye movements that can be tracked through virtual reality headsets reveal levels of information to an advertiser "that you should not be comfortable with."

"We can't go that way," Rosedale said. "As an industry or as an ecosystem, we can't use advertising as the business model for metaverses."

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HEADLINE	05/06 Russians tear holes in digital iron curtain
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/06/russia-vpn-putin-censorship-disinformation/
GIST	<p>RIGA, Latvia — When Russian authorities blocked hundreds of Internet sites in March, Konstantin decided to act. The 52-year-old company manager in Moscow tore a hole in the Digital Iron Curtain, which had been erected to control the narrative of the war in Ukraine, with a tool that lets him surf blocked sites and eyeball taboo news.</p> <p>Konstantin turned to a virtual private network, an encrypted digital tunnel commonly known as a VPN. Since the war began in late February, VPNs have been downloaded in Russia by the hundreds of thousands a day, a massive surge in demand that represents a direct challenge to President Vladimir Putin and his attempt to seal Russians off from the wider world. By protecting the locations and identities of users, VPNs are now granting millions of Russians access to blocked material.</p> <p>Downloading one in his Moscow apartment, Konstantin said, brought back memories of the 1980s in the Soviet Union, when he used a shortwave radio to hear forbidden news of dissident arrests on Radio Liberty, which is funded by the United States.</p> <p>“We didn’t know what was going on around us. That’s true again now,” said Konstantin, who, like other Russian VPN users, spoke on the condition that his last name be withheld for fear of government</p>

retribution. “Many people in Russia simply watch TV and eat whatever the government is feeding them. I wanted to find out what was really happening.”

Daily downloads in Russia of the 10 most popular VPNs jumped from below 15,000 just before the war to as many as 475,000 in March. As of this week, downloads were continuing at a rate of nearly 300,000 a day, according to data compiled for The Washington Post by the analytics firm Apptopia, which relies on information from apps, public data and an algorithm to come up with estimates.

Russian clients typically download multiple VPNs, but the data suggests millions of new users per month. In early April, Russian telecom operator Yota reported that the number of VPN users was over 50 times as high as in January, according to the Tass state news service.

The Internet Protection Society, a digital rights group associated with jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, launched its own VPN service last month and reached its limit of 300,000 users within 10 days, according to executive director Mikhail Klimarev. Based on internal surveys, he estimates that the number of VPN users in Russia has risen to roughly 30 percent of the 100 million Internet users in Russia. To combat Putin, “Ukraine needs Javelin and Russians need Internet,” Klimarev said.

By accessing banned Ukrainian and Western news sites, Konstantin said, he has come to deeply sympathize with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, a former comedian the Russian press has sought to falsely portray as a “drug addict.” He was recently compared to Adolf Hitler by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. “I loved him as an actor, but now I know Zelensky is also brave because I’ve seen him talk on Ukrainian news sites with my VPN,” Konstantin said.

Not only does widespread VPN use help millions of citizens reach material laying out the true extent of Russian military losses and countering the official portrayal of the war as a fight against fascists, say Russian Internet experts, it also limits government surveillance of activists. Russian officials have sought to curtail VPN use. A law in 2017 resulted in the banning of more than a dozen providers for refusing to comply with Russian censorship rules.

In the days before the war, and in the weeks since then, Russian authorities have also ratcheted up pressure on Google, asking the search engine to remove thousands of Internet sites associated with VPNs, according to the Lumen database, an archive of legal complaints related to Internet content. Google, which did not respond to a request for comment, still includes banned sites in search results.

The Russian government has been reluctant to ban VPNs completely. Policing such a ban would pose a technological challenge. In addition, many Russians use VPNs to access nonpolitical entertainment and communication tools, popular distractions from daily hardships. Last month, when asked on Belarusian television if he had downloaded a VPN, even Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov conceded: “Yes, I have. Why not?”

Since the war began, more than 1,000 Internet sites have been restricted by Russian authorities, including Facebook, Instagram, BBC News, Radio Liberty and Voice of America, according to a survey by a VPN technology tracker. The last independent Russian media outlets were forced to shut down, and those in exile that are offering critical content, such as the popular news site Meduza, have also been banned.

Today, even calling the Russian “special operation,” as Putin has forcibly dubbed the invasion, a “war” risks a sentence of up to 15 years in jail. Free speech has effectively disappeared, and even teachers who question the invasion are being reported to the authorities by their students.

“People want to see banned content, but I think they’re also genuinely scared,” said Tonia Samsonova, a Russian media entrepreneur based in Londond. “No matter your attitude toward the government or the war, every Russian knows that if the government knows too much about you, it’s potentially dangerous. So a VPN is so useful even if they aren’t critical of Putin.”

Katerina Abramova, spokeswoman for Meduza, said online traffic at the site declined only briefly after it was banned by Russian authorities in March. Traffic began surging from unlikely countries like the Netherlands, suggesting that Russians were utilizing VPNs that made them appear to be abroad. “VPNs won’t start a broad revolution in Russia,” she said. “But it’s a way people who are against this war can stay connected to the world.”

Natalia, an 83-year-old Muscovite and former computer operator, asked her adult daughter to help her download a VPN on her laptop shortly after the war started. She feared that the government would ban YouTube, preventing her from seeing her favorite program, an online talk show about technology news. The Kremlin has yet to block YouTube, though Russian Internet experts say the probability remains high.

Yet as the war progressed, Natalia found herself also looking at banned news sites, including Radio Free Europe, to stay informed, even as friends around her bought “totally” into the government line that Ukrainians were Nazis and Russia was facing an existential threat from the West. “People now just believe lie after lie. I feel so isolated,” she said.

Natalia said, for instance, that she has been able to read foreign news stories suggesting there were significant Russian casualties in the sinking last month of the Moskva, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. But the Russian press has reported only one official death, with 27 soldiers declared “missing.”

“Parents are just getting one answer from the Ministry of Defense that your son is missing,” she said. “Missing? Don’t you really mean dead? But they’re not saying that. They’re not telling the truth.”

Although downloading a VPN is technically easy, usually requiring only a few clicks, purchasing a paid VPN has become complicated in Russia, as Western sanctions have rendered Russian credit and debit cards nearly useless outside the country. That has forced many to resort to free VPNs, which can have spotty service and can sell information about users.

Vytautas Kaziukonis, chief executive of Surfshark — a Lithuania-based VPN that saw a 20-fold increase in Russian users in March — said some of those customers are now paying in cryptocurrencies or through people they know in third countries.

In a country used to hardships, Russians are good at creative workarounds. Elena, a 50-year-old Moscow tour operator, said she has managed to tap into her old Facebook account by repeatedly signing up for free trials with several different VPN providers to avoid payment. “We do what we have to do,” Elena said.

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HEADLINE	05/06 Robocalls increase; at all-time high
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/robocalls-increase-millions-recent-months
GIST	<p>Robocalls are at an all-time high, following a brief downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to organizations tracking them.</p> <p>Lee Williams, a California resident, said he's felt as if the calls have been endless: "There was a time when I would get 20 to 30 in a 24-hour period."</p> <p>He said he once depended on his phone provider to fix the issue.</p> <p>"They came out with what they call a 'spam blocker.' So, you'll get a call, and it'll say 'spam likely' but, I've found that probably a bit over 50% of those calls that were identified as scammers were actually calls you needed to receive. Family members that may not have been on your contact list or your doctor's office," he said.</p> <p>He said he downloaded an app to help screen calls more in-depth, but he still has received daily robocalls.</p> <p>According to YouMail's nationwide robocall tracker, such calls jumped by over 600 million from February to March.</p>

	<p>Sandra Guile with the Better Business Bureau said it's because of the pandemic.</p> <p>"When everybody was on lockdown and everybody was isolated, there was actually a dip in the amount of robocalls. Then, as things started to open up a little bit, that number went back up" Guile said.</p> <p>The Better Business Bureau has tracked scams such as those linked to robocalls. It warned these scams could cost consumers thousands of dollars.</p> <p>"If they have your personal identifiable information, they can use that data to open up credit cards, open up cell phones, or maybe even rent an apartment," Guile said.</p> <p>The BBB has recommended either using apps that block robocalls or simply not answering — and helping it track and identify these callers.</p> <p>"If you receive a phone number, and you don't answer, and it goes to voicemail, but it really sounds suspicious because they're claiming that perhaps your personal identifiable information is at risk, or it's an organization you've never heard of, you can go ahead and report it to BBB.org/scamtracker," Guile added.</p> <p>The Better Business Bureau explained that calls from legitimate businesses, campaign calls and charitable solicitations are allowed.</p> <p>The FCC recently announced it may now require providers to submit a "Robocall Mitigation Plan" describing how it will further block and screen these calls.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 ISIS claims attack killed 11 Egyptian troops
SOURCE	https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2022/05/09/ISIS-claims-attack-that-killed-11-Egyptian-troops
GIST	<p>An ISIS affiliate in Egypt on Sunday claimed responsibility for an attack that targeted a water pumping station east of the Suez Canal, killing at least 11 soldiers.</p> <p>At least five other soldiers were wounded in Saturday's attack, according to the Egyptian military. It was one of the deadliest attacks on Egyptian security forces in recent years.</p> <p>Thousands of people attended separate funerals for the dead Sunday.</p> <p>President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, meanwhile, presided over a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which includes the military's top commanders, to discuss the consequences of the attack, his office said without offering further details.</p> <p>The extremist group announced its claim of the attack in a statement carried by its Aamaq news agency. The authenticity of the statement could not be verified but it was released on Telegram as similar claims have been in the past.</p> <p>The attack took place in the town of Qantara in the province of Ismailia, which stretches eastwards from the Suez Canal.</p> <p>Extremists attacked troops at a checkpoint guarding the pumping facility, then fled the site. The military said troops were pursuing the attackers in an isolated area of the northern Sinai Peninsula.</p>

	<p>Egypt is battling an ISIS-led insurgency in the Sinai that intensified after the military overthrew an elected but divisive president in 2013. The extremists have carried out scores of attacks, mainly targeting security forces and Christians.</p> <p>The pace of extremist attacks in Sinai's main theater of operations and elsewhere has slowed to a trickle since February 2018, when the military launched an extensive operation in Sinai as well as parts of the Nile Delta and deserts along the country's western border with Libya.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 ISIS-K: 'duty' to deploy disinformation
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-declares-duty-and-war-policy-to-deploy-disinformation-as-a-weapon/
GIST	<p>Disseminating disinformation is a "duty" of jihadists in order to deceive and ultimately divide their foes and should be considered "part of the war policy," ISIS Khorasan declared in a new issue of the group's English-language magazine.</p> <p>The article in the fifth issue of <i>Voice of Khurasan</i> on making the use of media and psychological warfare a core tenet of their game plan comes after the group recently emphasized that "social media warfare" is a critical part of their strategy.</p> <p>"By all its types whether audio, visual, paper, satellite or internet," using various forms of media "is a necessity and is also urgent in order to propagate and cause defeatism and demoralization of the enemy, and show the strength of the mujahideen," said the latest issue. "...Therefore the media and all its technologies must be used by the da'ees [callers to Islam] and mujahideen to spread fear into the hearts of the enemy and to terrify them so that they do not think to stand in front of the Muslims ever."</p> <p>Deploying different types of weaponry is critical for "demonstrating strength," ISIS argues, as is "spreading rumors to strike fear into the heart of the enemy."</p> <p>"If we can shake the chain of the enemy and divide them that is part of the war policy to divide them and defeat them," the article continued. "...Spreading the rumors is therefore a duty upon the Muslim armies to cause fragmentation of the enemy because that disunity will demoralise them significantly."</p> <p>"Spreading fear" is another aim of disinformation that ISIS said is "very important as it will cause victory for the Muslims," and disinformation with the goal of deception was also stressed as crucial: "There is no dispute among the fuqaha [Islamic jurists] that it is allowed to deceive the kuffar [disbelievers] as much as we can in the battlefield."</p> <p>A separate article in the issue vowed to "continue to target the nations of Kufr, without differentiating amongst them," adding that their eyes "are fixed on neighboring countries, Iran, China, Uzbekistan, and other nations of kufr."</p> <p>"We we strike them just as we strike you while you will fail miserably to cover our actions to please your masters," ISIS-K said to the Taliban.</p> <p>In their third issue, ISIS-K declared that a concerted focus on "social media warfare" is critical to advance on the ideological battlefield but also in order to counter the pull of "enchanted" social media influencers.</p> <p>"War comes in many form and targets different aspects of humans. A war can be fought militarily targeting physical self or it can be fought ideologically targeting intellect," said that article. "As much importance the physical clashes hold ideological confrontations also matter if not more. The physical battle can be lost even before it starts if people, in our case Muslims, are defeated or at the least trapped in the battle for the hearts and minds."</p> <p>"Jihad against the crusaders and their allies is the best way to deter them. Jihad is not limited to fighting physically, and fighting with tongues are as important as fighting physically," ISIS-K continued. "In this age, social media warfare holds the utmost importance as the medias and social media personalities are</p>

	<p>enchanted the eyes of the people. Fighting in this field needs to be done in order to incite the believers and save other Muslims from the negative impact of the enchanting battle for hearts and minds.”</p> <p><i>Voice of Khurasan</i> was first published in February, with a 37-page inaugural issue. The page counts have decreased since then, with the fourth issue just 10 pages long and the current issue at 19 pages.</p> <p>In that first issue, the group declared that theirs is the “most important province” of ISIS after Iraq and Syria. The magazine furthered the long-running ISIS narrative that the loss of the group’s claimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria is “temporary,” adding that “although we lost the Khilafah territory and thousands of Mujahideen were martyred in a period of 5 years, there is no problem.”</p> <p>The second issue similarly dedicated ample space to criticizing the Taliban and argued that “to this day no entity, no person has ever ... brought forth a legit argument against the beliefs of the Khalifah” while slamming the “sheer stupidity” of al-Qaeda leadership. The magazine also brought up the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham merger in Syria and a frequent target of ISIS ire, HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, saying that he has “cut off his group from al-Qaeda, rebranded his group like he changes underpants in an attempt to escape from terrorism label.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Eid under Taliban; Afghanistan change
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/asia/afghanistan-eid-taliban.html
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan — Thousands of Afghans had piled into buses and set out down the country’s once perilous highways bound for relatives they had not seen in years. Afghanistan’s only national park was filled with tourists who had only dreamed of traveling to its intensely blue lakes and jagged mountains when fighting raged across the country.</p> <p>And Zulhijjah Mirzadah, a mother of five, packed a small picnic of dried fruit, gathered her family in a minibus and wove for two hours through the congested streets of the capital, Kabul, to a bustling amusement park.</p> <p>From the entrance, she could hear the low whoosh of a roller coaster and the chorus of joyous screams from Afghans inside celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. But she could not go further. Women, she was told at the gate, were barred by the Taliban from entering the park on Eid.</p> <p>“We’re facing economic problems, things are expensive, we can’t find work, our daughters can’t go to school — but we hoped to have a picnic in the park today,” said Ms. Mirzadah, 25.</p> <p>As Afghans endured the constant and random violence of the last two decades of war, many held hopes that when peace finally came to the country, Eid al-Fitr would be its high-water mark, a day where families long separated by fighting would finally be able to celebrate together.</p> <p>Now that war is over. People can travel freely down highways devoid of gunfire, roadside bombs and attempts at extortion. The terrifying drone of warplanes overhead is long gone. But for many, the holiday that began last Sunday in Afghanistan served as a reminder of the dissonance between the promise of peace many Afghans had imagined and the realities of the end of the war.</p> <p>A crippling economic crisis that has slashed incomes and sent the prices of basic goods soaring forced many families to forgo for the first time the Eid traditions of new clothes or dried fruit. Mosques were emptier than usual after a recent string of explosions stoked fears of the return of terrorist attacks.</p> <p>And many women in urban areas, who have been devastated by the Taliban government’s restrictions, found little reason to celebrate. On Saturday, the Taliban decreed that Afghan women must cover themselves from head to toe, expanding a series of onerous restrictions on women that dictate nearly every aspect of public life.</p>

“To be honest, we don’t have Eid this year,” said Ms. Mirzadah, who had spent the afternoon with her family sitting across the street from the park on a narrow strip of grass.

Most people in Kabul learned that the Taliban had announced the start of the holiday after a roar of celebratory gunfire thundered across the city last Saturday night. Afghanistan was the first Muslim country to officially declare a sighting of a full crescent moon, kicking off the start of the holiday.

The following morning, hundreds of men with prayer rugs tucked under their arms filed into the Sher Shah Suri Mosque, a large Sunni mosque in the west of Kabul. Across the courtyard, they laid out the rugs in the shade of twisted tree branches while armed Taliban intelligence agents clad in camouflage pants and bulletproof vests patrolled the mosque’s grounds for threats — a stark reminder of the threat of violence that persists despite the end of 20 years of war.

In the two weeks leading up to the start of Eid this year, a bloody spate of terrorist attacks on mosques, schools and public gatherings killed at least 100 people, mostly Afghan Shiites, and stirred fears that the large prayers on the first day of Eid would be the next target.

At the Seyyed Abad Mosque, the largest Shiite mosque in the city of Kunduz in the country’s north, only around 50 worshipers arrived for prayers on Sunday morning — compared to 400 to 500 people in previous years, attendees said. Many people, terrified of another blast, steered clear of the mosque altogether. But many of those who attended were motivated by a different fear: disobeying the Taliban government’s declaration that Eid began on Sunday.

Many Afghan Shiites cast doubt over the date — a day before Saudi Arabia and two days before Iran, a Shiite theocracy. But anxious about repercussions from the Taliban — which have employed police-state tactics to maintain order since seizing power — many attended Eid prayers on Sunday, even as they continued their daylong Ramadan fast and refrained from celebrating in their homes.

“The Taliban did not threaten us that we must pray, but as soon as they came and told us that Eid prayers would begin on Sunday, and that they would come to provide security at the mosque, no one dared to tell them that we did not believe Eid had begun,” said Mansoor, 33, a resident of Kunduz who preferred to use only his first name for fear of repercussions.

But for Taliban soldiers and police officers, the holiday offered a moment of reflection on the struggle that brought them back to power, and the lives they have established for themselves since.

In the parking lot of one police station in Kabul, a gaggle of Taliban policemen arrived in a dark green pick-up truck, weapons slung over their shoulder. Handcuffs dangled off the wrist of one police officer like a large bracelet, while another held to his nose a pink flower plucked from a median in the road.

Mohibullah Mushfiq, 26, had spent every Eid in mountainsides and dusty villages away from his relatives since he joined the Taliban at 15 years old. But after the Taliban seized power, he moved his family from their village in the east to a third-floor apartment in Kabul.

On the first morning of Eid this year, he shared sweets with his four-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, both bouncing with excitement at the prospect of spending the holiday in the big city. He welcomed his government’s announcement about the start of Eid with pride.

“It shows our unity, our position in the Islamic tradition — they announced Eid and everyone had to accept that,” he said.

Nearby in the parking lot, Ubaidullah Edris, 21, talked quietly into his phone. On the other end of the line, his mother pleaded with him to come home to their village in Wardak, a mountainous province southwest of Kabul, to celebrate Eid.

Speaking to her made him homesick, he said. His entire life, Mr. Edris had spent Eid in his village, trekking up a mountainside to roast a goat or sheep with his friends. But, after hanging up the phone, his nostalgia for home was quickly replaced by the sense of duty he felt staying in Kabul on patrol.

“I miss my relatives, but I’m happy to be here serving the people, providing security — this was my big ambition,” he said.

Across the country, some Afghans took advantage of the relative security the Taliban have been able to provide for Eid celebrations. Hundreds of domestic tourists flocked from around the country to Bamiyan, a province in central Afghanistan known for its natural beauty and ancient ruins, according to hotel owners and travel agents.

Parwin Sadat, 32, a private-school teacher, made a 27-hour trek to Bamiyan with her husband and six-year-old child from the western city of Herat — a trip that would have been all but impossible during the war, when fighting along highways made cities islands of their own. Visiting Bamiyan left Ms. Sadat awe-struck, she said.

“I didn’t know that our country has such tourist destinations, historical places and so much beauty,” she said.

But for many Afghans who have been crushed by the country’s economic collapse since the Taliban toppled the Western-backed government, the freedom of travel and luxury of celebratory outings remained out of reach.

City Park, the amusement park in Kabul, and the city’s zoo, had less than half of the number of visitors that typically come each Eid, according to park managers. The low turnout was a reflection of both the country’s economic downturn and the Taliban’s edict barring women from visiting on Eid — the latest in a growing roster of restrictions on women in public spaces.

In a modest house tucked into one of Kabul’s many hillsides, Zhilla, 18, gathered with relatives at her aunt’s house on the second day of Eid. Her young cousins and siblings chased each other in the small courtyard. Inside, Zhilla marveled over her new cousin, just six days old, sleeping peacefully in her mother’s lap.

“The baby knows we’ve been through a lot, she needs to behave for us,” Zhilla joked.

The previous year, she and her relatives had gathered by the city’s Qargha reservoir for a picnic by the river, as boys and girls rode bicycles along its banks and took boats out on the water — a memory that feels like a lifetime ago, she said.

“This Eid is the same as any other day — we cannot go out, we cannot be free,” she said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 Taliban divisions deepen over veil edict
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/anger-afghan-women-face-veil-edict-splits-taliban-84576368
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- Arooza was furious and afraid, keeping her eyes open for Taliban on patrol as she and a friend shopped Sunday in Kabul's Macroyan neighborhood.</p> <p>The math teacher was fearful her large shawl, wrapped tight around her head, and sweeping pale brown coat would not satisfy the latest decree by the country's religiously driven Taliban government. After all, more than just her eyes were showing. Her face was visible.</p> <p>Arooza, who asked to be identified by just one name to avoid attracting attention, wasn't wearing the all-encompassing burqa preferred by the Taliban, who on Saturday issued a new dress code for women appearing in public. The edict said only a woman's eyes should be visible.</p>

The decree by the Taliban's hardline leader Hibaitullah Akhunzada even suggested women shouldn't leave their homes unless necessary and outlines a series of punishments for male relatives of women violating the code.

It was a major blow to the rights of women in Afghanistan, who for two decades had been living with relative freedom before the Taliban takeover last August — when U.S. and other foreign forces withdrew in the chaotic end to a 20-year war.

A reclusive leader, Akhunzada rarely travels outside southern Kandahar, the traditional Taliban heartland. He favors the harsh elements of the group's previous time in power, in the 1990s, when girls and women were largely barred from school, work and public life.

Like Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar, Akhunzada imposes a strict brand of Islam that marries religion with ancient tribal traditions, often blurring the two.

Akhunzada has taken tribal village traditions where girls often marry at puberty, and rarely leave their homes, and called it a religious demand, analysts say.

The Taliban have been divided between pragmatists and hardliners, as they struggle to transition from an insurgency to a governing body. Meanwhile, their government has been dealing with a worsening economic crisis. And Taliban efforts to win recognition and aid from Western nations have floundered, largely because they have not formed a more representative government, and restricted the rights of girls and women.

Until now, hardliners and pragmatists in the movement have avoided open confrontation.

Yet divisions were deepened in March, on the eve of the new school year, when Akhunzada issued a last-minute decision that girls should not be allowed to go to school after completing the sixth grade. In the weeks ahead of the start of the school year, senior Taliban officials had told journalists all girls would be allowed back in school. Akhunzada asserted that allowing the older girls back to school violated Islamic principles.

A prominent Afghan who meets the leadership and is familiar with their internal squabbles said that a senior Cabinet minister expressed his outrage over Akhunzada's views at a recent leadership meeting. He spoke on condition of anonymity to speak freely.

Torek Farhadi, a former government adviser, said he believes Taliban leaders have opted not to spar in public because they fear any perception of divisions could undermine their rule.

"The leadership does not see eye to eye on a number of matters but they all know that if they don't keep it together, everything might fall apart," Farhadi said. "In that case, they might start clashes with each other."

"For that reason, the elders have decided to put up with each other, including when it comes to non-agreeable decisions which are costing them a lot of uproar inside Afghanistan and internationally," Farhadi added.

Some of the more pragmatic leaders appear to be looking for quiet workarounds that will soften the hard-line decrees. Since March, there has been a growing chorus, even among the most powerful Taliban leaders, to return older girls to school while quietly ignoring other repressive edicts.

Earlier this month, Anas Haqqani, the younger brother of Sirajuddin, who heads the powerful Haqqani network, told a conference in the eastern city of Khost that girls are entitled to education and that they would soon return to school — though he didn't say when. He also said that women had a role in building the nation.

“You will receive very good news that will make everyone very happy... this problem will be resolved in the following days,” Haqqani said at the time.

In the Afghan capital of Kabul on Sunday, women wore the customary conservative Muslim dress. Most wore a traditional hijab, consisting of a headscarf and long robe or coat, but few covered their faces, as directed by the Taliban leader a day earlier. Those wearing a burqa, a head-to-toe garment that covers the face and hides the eyes behind netting were in the minority.

“Women in Afghanistan wear the hijab, and many wear the burqa, but this isn't about hijab, this is about the Taliban wanting to make all women disappear,” said Shabana, who wore bright gold bangles beneath her flowing black coat, her hair hidden behind a black head scarf with sequins. “This is about the Taliban wanting to make us invisible.”

Arooza said the Taliban rulers are driving Afghans to leave their country. “Why should I stay here if they don't want to give us our human rights? We are human,” she said.

Several women stopped to talk. They all challenged the latest edict.

“We don't want to live in a prison,” said Parveen, who like the other women wanted only to give one name.

“These edicts attempt to erase a whole gender and generation of Afghans who grew up dreaming of a better world,” said Obaidullah Baheer, a visiting scholar at New York’s New School and former lecturer at the American University in Afghanistan.

“It pushes families to leave the country by any means necessary. It also fuels grievances that would eventually spill over into large-scale mobilization against the Taliban,” he said.

After decades of war, Baheer said it wouldn’t have taken much on the Taliban’s part to make Afghans content with their rule “an opportunity that the Taliban are wasting fast.”

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HEADLINE	05/07 Pakistan, Afghan Taliban in war of attrition
SOURCE	https://theprint.in/world/pakistan-afghan-taliban-turning-from-friends-to-arch-enemies-report/947035/
GIST	<p>Islamabad [Pakistan], May 7 (ANI): Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, who for long were the closest of allies, are now increasingly facing the prospect of getting involved in a war of attrition over their Islamist terrorism policies that have now come to haunt both of them, a report said.</p> <p>Pakistan is now eager to wash its hands off the links with terror groups it supported and gave shelter to in the last few decades. In Pakistan, at the same time, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), sheltered in the inaccessible hilly terrains of Afghanistan, is planning attacks inside Pakistan, International Forum for Rights and Security (IFFRAS) reported.</p> <p>In recent months, the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) is creating mayhem inside Afghanistan as it targets the Taliban, the report said.</p> <p>Both countries and their governments are confronting each other over the resultant violence. They are blaming each other for encouraging the terrorist groups to attack the other side, the report said.</p> <p>The terror groups that have close links with state agencies on both sides have now become Frankensteins neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan want to pamper any longer. But they find their hands tied for several reasons, the report further said.</p> <p>This year’s Ramzan period was particularly violent with suicide bombers targeting civilians and religious places in both countries, the report said, adding, the last such incident was a powerful explosion at the Khalifa Sahib Mosque in the west of Kabul that killed over 50 worshippers.</p>

The ruling Taliban was quick to counter global criticism that it had failed to secure the country because it was still supporting terrorist groups in Afghanistan, the report said.

The Taliban backs the Pashtun demand for Pashtunistan, as claimed largely by “Pashtun Taliban”. It encompasses a large area of Pakistani territory south of Kabul including Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North West Frontier Province or NWFP) inhabited by their ethnic clansmen, thereby taking their long-standing homeland claims to the municipal limits of Islamabad, the report further said.

The confrontation between the two countries has increased after the fencing work was taken up. Afghanistan says the fence affects the daily lives of families living on both sides of the border.

The farmers whose lands straddle the border also face problems. Same is the case with traders who make a living by exporting food products and other items from Afghanistan to Pakistan and vice-versa.

There is tension at the border after Taliban soldiers last December disrupted the fence construction work by the Pakistan military. The situation was not allowed to escalate with both sides backing down subsequently, the report said.

However, this January, a Taliban commander, Mawillawi Sanaullah Sangin, issued a warning to Pakistan. He was quoted by Afghanistan’s Tolo News as saying: “We (the Taliban) will not allow the fencing anytime, in any form. Whatever they did before, they did, but we will not allow it anymore.”

With the strained relations over the border fencing, the Taliban openly backing the demand for Pashtunistan, and Pakistan and Afghanistan both experiencing terrorist attacks, the region is literally sitting on a powder keg, the report concluded. (ANI)

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HEADLINE	05/07 NY subway shooting suspect indicted
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/new-york-subway-shooting-suspect-indicted-terrorism-charge-2022-05-08/
GIST	<p>May 7 (Reuters) - A U.S. grand jury on Saturday indicted a man for terrorism and other charges stemming from an April 12 gunfire and smoke bomb attack that injured 23 people on the New York City subway.</p> <p>The indictment in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York charged Frank James, 62, with a terrorist attack and other violence against a mass transportation system plus a count of discharging a firearm during a crime of violence.</p> <p>If convicted on the terrorism charge James could be sentenced to life in prison.</p> <p>Defense attorneys representing James did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>James is accused of setting off smoke bombs and opening fire inside a New York City subway car in Brooklyn, striking 10 people with gunfire and setting off a round-the-clock manhunt.</p> <p>Thirteen others were injured in the frantic rush to flee the smoke-filled train, police said.</p> <p>He was taken into custody some 30 hours later in lower Manhattan, about 8 miles (13 km) from the scene of the assault, after authorities determined his whereabouts with the help of tips from residents, some of whom posted sightings on social media, police said.</p> <p>James, a Bronx native with recent addresses in Philadelphia and Milwaukee, had previously been charged with a criminal complaint filed by law enforcement over the attack. The more formal indictment came after prosecutors presented evidence to a grand jury.</p> <p>Authorities accuse James of setting off two smoke bombs inside a subway car moments before opening fire on fellow passengers with a semi-automatic handgun. The gun, purchased in 2011, was later recovered</p>

	<p>from the scene, along with three extended-ammunition magazines, a torch, a hatchet, a bag of fireworks and a container of gasoline, according to police and court documents.</p> <p>The attack followed string of violent crimes unnerving passengers in the America's largest metropolitan transit system, including instances of commuters being pushed onto subway tracks from station platforms.</p> <p>The motive remained unclear. An FBI affidavit referred to a number of YouTube videos James posted addressing statements to New York City's mayor about homelessness and the subway system.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 AQ leader blames US for Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://kstp.com/associated-press/ap-us-international/al-qaida-chief-blames-us-for-ukraine-invasion-in-new-video/
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD (AP) — Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri made an appearance in a pre-recorded video to mark the 11th anniversary of the death of his predecessor Osama bin Laden.</p> <p>Al-Zawahri says in the video that “U.S. weakness” was the reason that its ally Ukraine became “prey” for the Russian invasion.</p> <p>The 27-minute speech was released Friday according to the SITE Intelligence group, which monitors militant activity. The leader appears sitting at a desk with books and a gun.</p> <p>Urging Muslim unity, al-Zawahri said the U.S. was in a state of weakness and decline, citing the impact of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan launched after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Bin Laden was the mastermind and financier behind the attacks.</p> <p>“Here (the U.S.) is after its defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, after the economic disasters caused by the 9/11 invasions, after the Corona pandemic, and after it left its ally Ukraine as prey for the Russians,” he said.</p> <p>Bin Laden was killed in a 2011 raid by U.S. forces on his compound hideout in Pakistan.</p> <p>Al-Zawahri’s whereabouts are unknown. He is wanted by the FBI and there is a \$25 million reward for information leading to his capture.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Militants jail break Burkina Faso inmates
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/heavily-armed-militants-break-60-inmates-burkina-faso-prison-2022-05-08/
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, May 8 (Reuters) - Militants freed around 60 prisoners during an attack on a jail in northwest Burkina Faso overnight, ransacking offices and setting vehicles ablaze before making their escape, two security sources and a judicial source said.</p> <p>Armed men entered the town of Nouna around midnight aboard 4x4s and motorbikes, brandishing Kalashnikovs and heavy machine guns, the security sources said.</p> <p>The militants freed around 60 men from the city jail, its entire prisoner population.</p> <p>Burkina Faso is battling a jihadist insurgency that has spread from neighbouring Mali over the past decade, where violent attacks are weekly occurrences. Thousands have been killed across the region, and millions forced to flee their homes.</p> <p>No one was killed during the weekend's prison raid, but a volunteer militia fighter was shot, according to security sources. Several of the prison's trucks and motorbikes were set on fire, and its offices were trashed.</p>

	<p>No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.</p> <p>The raid came just hours after unknown militants killed at least 11 people between the northern towns of Dori and Gorgadji, according to two local officials. Among the dead were nine militiamen and two civilians.</p> <p>Burkina Faso's army on Friday said that another 11 soldiers, militiamen and police officers were killed in other attacks over the past week, but that more than 20 militants were killed in retaliation.</p> <p>Frustration over the government's inability to protect citizens has spurred protests in Burkina Faso that culminated in a military coup in January, West Africa's fourth in 18 months after two in Mali and one in Guinea.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 IS claims firing rockets into Tajikistan
SOURCE	https://www.siasat.com/islamic-state-claims-rockets-fired-from-afghanistan-into-tajikistan-2322974/
GIST	<p>Kabul: The Islamic State (IS) extremist group claimed it fired a number of rockets from Afghanistan into the territory of neighbouring Tajikistan, according to an Afghan media reports.</p> <p>The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency reported that an IS press release claimed the militants fired seven rockets from the Khawaja Ghar district of Afghanistan's Takhar Province toward unspecified military targets in Tajikistan on May 7, RFE/RL reported.</p> <p>But in a statement, Tajikistan said that "bullets, not rockets", were fired "accidentally" into Tajik territory during a firefight on the Afghan side of the border between Taliban forces and IS militants.</p> <p>The press centre of the State Committee for National Security said border troops have been put on alert, but added that the situation at the border "is considered stable and is under control" after "bullets accidentally crossed the territory of our country", RFE/RL reported.</p> <p>No casualties were reported. Neither account could be verified independently and there was no confirmation by the Taliban.</p> <p>The local IS affiliate, the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (IS-K), is a foe of the Taliban group that took over Afghanistan in August following a blitz offensive amid the withdrawal of US-led international troops.</p> <p>IS-K has claimed responsibility for a series of recent bombings, the worst of which was an attack last month on a mosque and religious school in the northern province of Kunduz that killed at least 33 people.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Burkina Faso faces rising jihadi violence
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/burkina-fasos-displaced-numbers-swell-amid-jihadi-violence-84573376
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso -- Ami Sana hangs a tattered tarp for a bit of shade where she can rest on a break from pounding stones under the scorching sun.</p> <p>"The work is hard. It makes my body weak, but what else can I do?" she asked.</p> <p>The mother of six is one of 2 million people displaced by Burkina Faso's rapidly rising Islamic extremist violence, according to the U.N.</p> <p>Amid the clamor of clanging pickaxes and falling rocks, Sana has found work in the Pissy granite mine on the outskirts of Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou.</p>

Lifting heavy rocks and hammering them into gravel to sell to construction companies is tough work that doesn't earn her enough to adequately feed or educate her children, Sana said. But it's the best work that she could find.

The rush of civilians from rural villages plagued by extremist violence has put pressure on Burkina Faso's cities.

"Some of the host cities have doubled or tripled in size in the past three years, and their infrastructures are often stretched to a breaking point," said Hassane Hamadou, country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council.

"Schools can't absorb all the new children, water points can't provide enough for all. Hundreds of thousands are left without access to an education, clean water or healthcare as a result," he said.

The influx of displaced people is causing competition among the approximately 3,000 people working at the granite mine. At least 500 displaced people started working at the mine last year making it harder for the original miners to earn a living, said Abiba Tiemtore, head of the site.

"With more people, it's hard to collect as many rocks and it's impacting our daily income," she said. Miners who used to make approximately \$1 a day say they are now lucky if they make 80 cents.

When it seized power in January, Burkina Faso's ruling junta vowed to stamp out extremist violence but it has done little about the swelling numbers of displaced.

The government has a responsibility to provide the swelling numbers of displaced with those social services, said Alexandra Lamarche, senior advocate for West and Central Africa for Refugees International.

The minister of humanitarian affairs did not respond to a request for comment on the situation.

So far the junta has not succeeded in stemming the extremist violence. In January, 160,000 people were newly displaced, the second-largest monthly increase in three years, according to a report by international aid groups. Hard-hit areas like the Center North region, which hosts Burkina Faso's largest displaced population, are buckling under the pressure.

"The impact of people moving from their farms into big cities is disorientation (and) the increase of poverty (and) fear," said Abdoulaye Pafadnam, former mayor of Barsalogho, one of the main towns in the Center North region.

The violence is cutting off access for aid groups to reach people in need. Roads that were safe to travel six months ago are lined with explosives and the United Nations had only one helicopter until recently to transport people and aid across the country.

The pressure on cities has also started creating rifts between some host and displaced communities. In the northern town of Ouahigouya, people sheltering in a crowded displacement camp said locals chase them from the forest if they try to chop wood for cooking, accusing them of trying to destroy it.

With no end to the jihadi violence in sight, the numbers of Burkina Faso's displaced are expected to continue flooding urban centers where they'll be hunting for jobs.

"I worry that I have no means to take care of my children," said Fati Ouedraogo, a displaced mother of 10 in Ouahigouya. "When the children are crying I don't know what to do."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Israel arrests 2 suspects in ax attack
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/middleeast/israel-suspects-arrested-attack.html

GIST	<p>JERUSALEM — Israeli security forces captured two Palestinians on Sunday who were suspected of perpetrating an ax attack that killed three Israeli Jews in the central town of Elad on Thursday night. The detentions ended an intensive search and calmed fears that the assailants could come out of hiding and attack again.</p> <p>The two suspects were captured alive and unarmed as they hid in bushes in woodland, the authorities said, not far from Elad, a predominantly ultra-Orthodox town. The Israeli police, the military and the Shin Bet internal security agency announced the capture on Sunday morning and released photographs and video of the moment of the men’s arrest.</p> <p>The assault in Elad on Thursday was the fifth terrorist attack in Israel since late March.</p> <p>The police distributed the names and photographs of two suspects Thursday night, identifying them as Asad Al Refai, 19, and Subhi Abu Shakir, 20, both residents of the Palestinian village of Romana in the northern Jenin district of the occupied West Bank.</p> <p>Tensions have risen in recent weeks amid clashes during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at Al Aqsa Mosque compound, a Jerusalem holy site also revered by Jews as the Temple Mount.</p> <p>Hamas, the Islamist militant group that controls Gaza, has urged Palestinians and Arab citizens of Israel to attack Israelis. Days before the assault in Elad, Yehya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, warned that any further raids by the Israeli police in the mosque compound would prompt a response. In a fiery speech, he urged members of Israel’s Arab minority to “get your cleavers, axes or knives ready.”</p> <p>In all, 19 people have been killed in Arab attacks since March 20.</p> <p>Israel has responded with a series of raids in the occupied West Bank and nearly 30 Palestinians have been killed, according to local news reports, most of them involved in attacks or confrontations with Israeli forces.</p> <p>Israeli officials said that one of the victims of Thursday’s ax attack in Elad, Oren Ben-Yiftah, 35, a deliveryman, had given the attackers a ride from the boundary between Israel and the West Bank to the town. Mr. Ben-Yiftah, a father of six from Lod, Israel, apparently believed that the pair were going to work in Elad.</p> <p>After arriving in Elad, the assailants killed Mr. Ben-Yiftah in his car then ran into a park to continue their rampage, terrorizing families who were celebrating Israel’s Independence Day. There they killed Boaz Gol, 49, and Yonatan Havakuk, 44, residents of Elad who each had five children, and wounded several other men.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Taliban decree: women head-to-toe burqa
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-49b17d77d03022ad4817eeecf4f5da93
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers on Saturday ordered all Afghan women to wear head-to-toe clothing in public — a sharp, hard-line pivot that confirmed the worst fears of rights activists and was bound to further complicate Taliban dealings with an already distrustful international community.</p> <p>The decree says that women should leave the home only when necessary, and that male relatives would face punishment — starting with a summons and escalating up to court hearings and jail time — for women’s dress code violations.</p> <p>It was the latest in a series of repressive edicts issued by the Taliban leadership, not all of which have been implemented. Last month for example the Taliban forbade women to travel alone, but after a day of opposition, that has since been silently ignored.</p>

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said it was deeply concerned with what appeared to be a formal directive that would be implemented and enforced, adding that it would seek clarifications from the Taliban about the decision.

“This decision contradicts numerous assurances regarding respect for and protection of all Afghans’ human rights, including those of women and girls, that had been provided to the international community by Taliban representatives during discussions and negotiations over the past decade,” it said in a statement.

The decree, which calls for women to only show their eyes and recommends they wear the head-to-toe burqa, evoked similar restrictions on women during the Taliban’s previous rule between 1996 and 2001.

“We want our sisters to live with dignity and safety,” said Khalid Hanafi, acting minister for the Taliban’s vice and virtue ministry.

The Taliban previously decided against reopening schools to girls above grade 6, reneging on an earlier promise and opting to appease their hard-line base at the expense of further alienating the international community. But this decree does not have widespread support among a leadership that’s divided between pragmatists and the hardliners.

That decision disrupted efforts by the Taliban to win recognition from potential international donors at a time when the country is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis.

“For all dignified Afghan women wearing Hijab is necessary and the best Hijab is chadori (the head-to-toe burqa) which is part of our tradition and is respectful,” said Shir Mohammad, an official from the vice and virtue ministry in a statement.

“Those women who are not too old or young must cover their face, except the eyes,” he said. “Islamic principles and Islamic ideology are more important to us than anything else,” Hanafi said.

Senior Afghanistan researcher Heather Barr of Human Rights Watch urged the international community to put coordinated pressure on the Taliban.

“(It is) far past time for a serious and strategic response to the Taliban’s escalating assault on women’s rights,” she wrote on Twitter.

The Taliban were ousted in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition for harboring al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and returned to power after America’s chaotic departure last year.

The White National Security Council condemned the Taliban’s Saturday decree and urged them to immediately reverse it.

“We are discussing this with other countries and partners. The legitimacy and support that the Taliban seeks from the international community depend entirely on their conduct, specifically their ability to back stated commitments with actions,” it said in a statement.

Since taking power last August, the Taliban leadership has been squabbling among themselves as they struggle to transition from war to governing. It has pit hard-liners against the more pragmatic among them.

A spokeswoman from Pangea, an Italian non-governmental organization that has assisted women for years in Afghanistan, said the new decree would be particularly difficult for them to swallow since they had lived in relative freedom until the Taliban takeover.

“In the last 20 years, they have had the awareness of human rights, and in the span of a few months have lost them,” Silvia Redigolo said by telephone. “It’s dramatic to (now) have a life that doesn’t exist,” she said.

Infuriating many Afghans is the knowledge that many of the Taliban of the younger generation, like Sirajuddin Haqqani, are educating their girls in Pakistan, while in Afghanistan women and girls have been targeted by their repressive edicts since taking power.

Girls have been banned from school beyond grade 6 in most of the country since the Taliban's return. Universities opened earlier this year in much of the country, but since taking power the Taliban edicts have been erratic. While a handful of provinces continued to provide education to all, most provinces closed educational institutions for girls and women.

The religiously driven Taliban administration fears that going forward with enrolling girls beyond the sixth grade could alienate their rural base, Hashmi said.

In the capital, Kabul, private schools and universities have operated uninterrupted.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/08 Mystery: 3 Americans die at Bahamas resort
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/world/americas/bahamas-sandals-resort-americans-dead.html
GIST	<p>Three Americans died under mysterious circumstances and another was hospitalized on Friday while they were staying at the Sandals Resort on Great Exuma Island in the Bahamas, the authorities said.</p> <p>The Bahamian police went to the hotel after a staff member found one of the travelers, a man, unresponsive in his villa on Friday morning, the police said in a news release. Officials were then informed that two more people, a man and a woman, had been found unresponsive in another villa.</p> <p>The man in the first villa was on the ground. In the second villa, the man was slumped against a wall in the bathroom, and the woman was on a bed. All three were pronounced dead by a doctor, the police said.</p> <p>Chester Cooper, the tourism minister of the Bahamas, said on Facebook that the cause of the deaths was unknown but that foul play was not suspected. He added that a fourth American, a woman, had been airlifted to a hospital in Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas.</p> <p>The country's health minister, Dr. Michael Darville, told ABC News that the woman was in stable condition.</p> <p>The couple in the second villa were found to have suffered convulsions and there were no signs of trauma, the police said. On Thursday night, the couple had complained of feeling ill, were treated at a local medical clinic and returned to the resort, the police said.</p> <p>Dr. Darville told Eyewitness News Bahamas on Saturday that one or more people had shown signs of vomiting and nausea at the clinic.</p> <p>The identities of the guests were not released. Mr. Cooper said on Facebook on Sunday that the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Tourism and officials from the U.S. Embassy were collaborating to formally identify the victims.</p> <p>Chris Coucheron-Aamot, a guest at the Sandals resort, wrote on Facebook that the cause of the episode "may have been a fault with the a/c in the unit, causing a toxic coolant leak."</p> <p>Mr. Coucheron-Aamot did not reply to a request for comment on Sunday. In statements, Sandals and the U.S. State Department both confirmed the three deaths but declined to comment on more detailed reports about the case.</p>

“We are closely monitoring local authorities’ investigation into the cause of death,” the department said. The man who was found dead in a villa and the hospitalized person were Vincent and Donnis Chiarella of Birmingham, Ala., their son Austin Chiarella told ABC News.

The Chiarellas were staying at the resort to celebrate their anniversary, Austin Chiarella said, adding that he learned details of the episode in a phone call with his mother on Saturday.

On Thursday night, Ms. Chiarella had become sick and visited a clinic but decided she felt fine upon discharge. Ms. Chiarella and her husband went to sleep in their villa.

“She woke up and my dad was laying there on the floor, and she couldn’t move,” Austin Chiarella told ABC. “Her legs and arms was swollen and she couldn’t move and she screamed to get someone to come in the door.”

Dr. Darville said that those investigating included environmental scientists to ensure there was not a public health issue but that it did not appear necessary to set up what he called a “makeshift facility” and “mini-hospital” because the episode appeared to be isolated.

He added that officials had “some ideas” of the underlying cause but did not provide further details, except that he was waiting for the results of toxicology and blood tests.

In its [statement](#), Sandals said its staff had followed protocols by alerting medical professions and the local authorities as soon as possible. The company is based in the Caribbean and operates 16 resorts across the Caribbean, according to its [website](#).

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HEADLINE	05/07 UN money, risk taking officials, questions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/07/world/americas/un-loan-project-services.html
GIST	<p>At the United Nations, two officials had a problem. The little-known agency they ran found itself with an extra \$61 million, and they didn’t know what to do with it.</p> <p>Then they met a man at a party.</p> <p>Now, they have \$25 million less.</p> <p>In between was a baffling series of financial decisions, in which experienced diplomats entrusted tens of millions of dollars, the agency’s entire investment portfolio at the time, to a British businessman after meeting him at the party. They also gave his daughter \$3 million to produce a pop song, a video game and a website promoting awareness of environmental threats to the world’s oceans.</p> <p>Things did not go well.</p> <p>Though U.N. auditors said the man’s businesses defaulted on more than \$22 million in loans — all money meant to aid the developing world — the agency, the United Nations Office for Project Services, said in a statement last month that “funds are at risk, but to date, no funds have been lost.” The agency added that it would “pursue all available legal remedies to protect its operations and assets, including the recovery of outstanding payments owed to” it.</p> <p>The story of these misbegotten investments was, at times, surreal. There was a cameo by the Italian-born man about town who had introduced Donald J. Trump to a model named Melania Knauss, the future first lady. There was a concert in the U.N.’s General Assembly hall as it sat nearly empty — where a Norwegian diplomat with a backing band crooned the ocean song (“Just a drop of rain / That’s all I am”).</p>

But diplomats and former U.N. officials say the tale also demonstrates what critics say is a serious problem with the U.N.: a culture of impunity among some top leaders, who wield huge budgets with little outside oversight.

“What do you call it when you believe you’re God?” said Jonas Svensson, who recently left the Office for Project Services. Mr. Svensson said his bosses had a rare combination of too little preparation and too much tolerance for risk — plus the power to see bad ideas through.

“Ambition and stupidity,” Mr. Svensson said. “All the way into the wall.”

This past week, a U.N. spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said the institution had completed an internal investigation of the transactions in question, but he declined to say what the inquiry had found. He said that António Guterres, the U.N. secretary general, would “take appropriate action on the findings of the investigation report once it has been reviewed and analyzed.”

The top official at the Office for Project Services, Grete Faremo of Norway, announced early Sunday that she was stepping down.

Ms. Faremo had previously planned to retire in September, but — in a letter to employees sent hours after this article was posted online — she said an interim replacement would be appointed “imminently.”

“Without knowing the full story, it happened on my watch,” Ms. Faremo wrote in a letter to the office’s staff, which was obtained by The New York Times. She said she had informed Mr. Guterres of her decision on Friday. “I acknowledge my responsibility and have decided to step down.”

The second-highest-ranking official at the agency, Vitaly Vanshelboim of Ukraine, was placed on administrative leave because of the investigation. He declined to comment.

A London law firm representing the British businessman, David Kendrick, and his daughter, Daisy Kendrick, released statements saying the pair had done nothing wrong. The law firm said Mr. Kendrick’s companies had been hampered by the pandemic and decisions by foreign governments.

“Our clients strongly believe in the projects they are running and in their ability to deliver these, and regret the fact that they appear to have become, through no fault of their own, the targets of a campaign seeking to harm their reputations,” wrote the law firm, Carter-Ruck.

The case has become the talk of the U.N. after a series of blog posts by [Mukesh Kapila](#), a former U.N. official who is widely read by diplomats, and [an article by the news outlet Devex](#). The Times reconstructed the story of the lost millions using documents from U.N. auditors, business records and interviews with dozens of people in eight countries.

A Party in Manhattan

The party that began it all was held in 2015 in the antique-filled 5,000-square-foot Upper East Side apartment of Gloria Starr Kins — the 95-year-old editor and publisher of a diplomatic society magazine that covers U.N. parties and events.

It was hosted by Ms. Faremo, a former justice minister and defense minister of Norway. She had taken over the Office for Project Services in 2014 — and [later said](#) she had made it faster and less risk-averse: “More than 1,200 pages of rules went into the trash.” Also in attendance was Mr. Vanshelboim, a U.N. veteran and financial whiz who describes himself on LinkedIn as a “SERIAL OVERACHIEVER.”

Their agency was one of the U.N.’s less glamorous: a kind of general contractor to the world. Other U.N. agencies hired it to build schools and [roads](#), deliver [medical equipment](#) or perform [other logistical tasks](#). That job was huge and vital. But at the U.N., prestige came from standing at lecterns — giving grants and giving orders. Their office did neither.

But that was set to change.

“I wanted to move away from being the silent partner,” Ms. Faremo [later wrote](#).

Her agency had stockpiled tens of millions of dollars in excess fees paid to it by other U.N. agencies, and now she and Mr. Vanshelboim wanted to lend out the money, like a bank, to fund profit-making projects in the developing world. Instead of a humdrum contracting hub, they would run a revolutionary in-house investment firm.

But they hadn’t found someone to lend to. That was the point of the party.

Then, through the door came Paolo Zampolli, a man who makes introductions.

One of the U.N.’s best-known characters, Mr. Zampolli is an Italian American businessman who also serves as an ambassador for the Caribbean island of Dominica. And he has long nurtured the dream of something bigger: having his own U.N.-approved conservation group called [We Are the Oceans](#), or WATO.

“WATO is the NATO of the oceans,” Mr. Zampolli said. (He means that it would be an alliance of like-minded governments, not that it would be armed.)

When he was a modeling executive, Mr. Zampolli [introduced Mr. Trump to the future first lady](#). At the time of the party, he was making introductions for Mr. Kendrick, the British businessman, who was selling a system for building fast, cheap, sturdy homes in the developing world. And if making the introductions worked?

“Could that bring me money? Yes, of course,” Mr. Zampolli said. “That’s called real estate.”

At that party, it worked. Mr. Kendrick and his daughter met Ms. Faremo and Mr. Vanshelboim there, according to Mr. Zampolli and an employee of Mr. Kendrick’s at the time who was present, Ramy Azoury. Ms. Faremo said she did not recall whom she met at the party, but a photo from the event shows her holding a business card for Mr. Kendrick’s company.

Later, using the acronym for the Office for Project Services, Mr. Zampolli said: “David came to me and said, ‘Paolo, these UNOPS people are very interested. They can invest.’”

In 2017, the U.N. agency gave a \$3 million grant to a conservation group run by Ms. Kendrick, who was a recent college graduate.

But Mr. Zampolli said he was never paid a finder’s fee. In fact, Mr. Zampolli said he now regretted making the introduction at all. Ms. Kendrick, it turned out, had named her group [We Are the Oceans](#). His name.

“I was truly used,” Mr. Zampolli said.

Singing About the Ocean

The U.N. agency declined to say how — out of all the world’s environmental groups — it had chosen Ms. Kendrick’s group for such a large grant. She had set up her New York-based group as a nonprofit a year earlier but never obtained approval from the Internal Revenue Service for a tax exemption as a charity.

Ms. Kendrick signed incorporation papers that seemed to give an inaccurate picture of the group’s leadership. Mr. Azoury and Ms. Starr Kins — two other people who were at the 2015 party — were both listed as directors, but both said in recent interviews that they had no connection to the group, did not know their names had been used and had known Ms. Kendrick only in passing.

“They stole my name,” Ms. Starr Kins said. “She knows I am well-known and she used me.”

Ms. Kendrick's group produced events, a website, ocean-themed games by the makers of Angry Birds and a pop song about the ocean that was [recorded by the British singer Joss Stone](#). The U.N. agency said its internal investigations group had started a review of the partnership with Ms. Kendrick's group.

Her father also seemed to play a major role behind the scenes, according to people who dealt with the group. When Ms. Stone signed a recording agreement, the agreement assigned control of the song — and the right to sell it — to a for-profit company that Mr. Kendrick [was a director of](#), according to a copy of the contract provided by Ms. Stone. The company paid for the band that accompanied Ms. Stone.

Ms. Stone said she had agreed to record the song for free, believing it was a fund-raiser for the U.N.

Ms. Kendrick's lawyers said in a statement that We Are the Oceans delivered on all of its promises to the U.N. and that "the rates paid to all WATO's participants were at all times legitimate and fair."

Mr. Svensson, the former employee at the Office for Project Services, said his bosses were focused on arranging a performance of the song by Ms. Faremo. He said she wanted to sing it in the U.N.'s cavernous hall during a 2017 conference about the oceans. They flew in a backing band from Britain, he said.

"Whatever it takes," he remembered a supervisor saying.

Ms. Faremo sang. But, Mr. Svensson said, an earlier speaker ran so far over time that the hall was largely empty. Mr. Svensson said he planned to include a video of the performance in a documentary he is making about the U.N.

"I agreed to sing this due to my background as a singer," Ms. Faremo said in a written statement last week. Despite the delayed start, she said, "there was still a crowd in the hall."

Loans Under Scrutiny

The next year, in 2018, the Office for Project Services announced it was making its first loans. Over the next two years, according to U.N. records, it lent \$8.8 million to a company investing in a wind farm in Mexico and \$15 million to another company for renewable energy projects. A further \$35 million went to build housing in Antigua, Ghana, India, Kenya and Pakistan, projects overseen by a third company.

Business records show that all three companies appear to be connected to Mr. Kendrick. He owns two of them through a family office in the British territory of Gibraltar. The third, based in Spain, does not list an owner in its corporate records — but its directors are longtime associates of Mr. Kendrick, and its email address leads to a company that Mr. Kendrick appears to own half of. U.N. auditors and Mr. Kendrick's lawyers both referred to the three companies as if they were a single entity.

Mr. Kendrick is a 58-year-old British native who has listed addresses in Spain, according to public records, and he is associated with more than a dozen interlocking companies in multiple countries, mostly in the world of construction. [One video](#), from a project in Antigua in 2014, shows him saying: "I don't build houses. I'm inspired to build communities."

It is difficult to get a complete picture of his finances. But at least some of his businesses have struggled at times: U.N. auditors said one of Mr. Kendrick's companies had lost \$20.2 million in 2017 and \$14.9 million in 2018.

The U.N. auditors said officials had chosen his companies because they believed his building technology "allowed for quickly built, high-quality and earthquake- and hurricane-resistant homes." Ms. Faremo approved the loans herself, the auditors found.

Still, the auditors raised alarms that the Office for Project Services had concentrated all of its risk in one place. They wrote in July 2020 that they were "of the view that UNOPS did not follow a sound and transparent method in selecting a partner."

Just a few months after that, the agency began trying to get its money back, without providing any public reason for doing so. In October 2020, according to U.N. reports, Mr. Kendrick's companies agreed to return millions lent for the wind farm and the renewable energy projects. But they did not follow through on returning the money.

Months went by.

Finally, according to a U.N. audit report last year, one of Mr. Kendrick's companies admitted it had used the U.N.'s loan to pay off other loans: "A large portion of the \$15 million deposit had been used to discharge its pre-existing debts and liabilities," the auditors' report said. The U.N. auditors said last year that Mr. Kendrick's companies had made some small payments, but the auditors expected the U.N. agency to lose \$22 million.

The other loans, which were intended to fund affordable housing projects, are still officially pending. But the U.N. said that, so far, no houses had been completed.

"Not a single housing project has been built," said P.K. Sarpong, a spokesman for the government of Ghana, where the U.N. loans [were supposed to allow work to begin on 200,000 homes](#). Top officials in Ghana helped announce the deal, but after "the pomp and pageantry, they didn't hear about the project again," Mr. Sarpong said.

Mr. Kendrick's lawyers said that his companies were in the process of restructuring their loans from the U.N. agency and that "no funds have been lost."

The financial mess threatens to undermine the broader trust of the U.N.'s member countries in the institution at a time when the U.N. is seeking millions of dollars to deal with the war in Ukraine and surging food prices. Finland, for example, had pledged \$20 million to support the Office for Project Services' investments, which were run out of an office in Helsinki, the country's capital. But Finland has since suspended its funding, according to diplomats and a statement from its foreign ministry.

"They are investing money that the United States and other countries have provided," Christopher P. Lu, a senior official at the U.S. mission to the U.N., said of the agency. "So they need to be good stewards of our money."

But the U.N. is a place where accountability often comes slowly and in secret. It was unclear when, if ever, the U.N. would release the results of the investigation that it said this past week had been completed.

If there are to be broader reforms at the Office for Project Services, they would come from its executive board — a group of diplomats from U.N. member states. In the wake of the losses, the board in February demanded an "independent comprehensive evaluation" of what had happened.

It is due in June. June 2024.

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HEADLINE	05/07 'Forever chemicals' in children textiles
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/07/pfas-forever-chemicals-children-textiles
GIST	<p>Nearly 60% of children's textiles labeled "waterproof", "stain-resistant", or "environmentally friendly" that were tested as part of a new study contained toxic PFAS substances known as "forever chemicals" due to their persistence in the environment.</p> <p>Among products checked were clothing, pillow protectors, bedding and furniture.</p> <p>"It's definitely a concern because these toxic chemicals can make their way into children's bodies," said Laurel Schaidler, one of the study's authors.</p>

PFAS, or per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of more than 9,000 compounds typically used across dozens of industries to make products water-, stain- or heat-resistant. They're in thousands of everyday consumer products such as stain guards, cookware, food packaging and waterproof clothing.

The chemicals are linked to cancer, birth defects, liver disease, thyroid disease, decreased immunity, hormone disruption and a range of other serious health problems. They're dubbed "forever chemicals" because they do not naturally break down, and they accumulate in humans.

The peer-reviewed study was conducted by the public health advocacy group Silent Spring Institute and published in the Environmental Science and Technology journal. It aimed to provide a sense of the chemicals' use in products that come with labeling suggesting it's environmentally friendly or protective from stains and water. The study is not intended to provide a representative sample of children's textiles.

It detected PFAS in 54 of 93 products, including 21 with labels such as "eco", "green" or "non-toxic". The chemicals were most widely used in products labeled "water-" or "stain-" resistant.

PFAS in clothing can get in the body via several routes. The chemicals are volatile, meaning they can break off from the products to which they're applied, then move through the air and be breathed in. They can also attach to dust that's breathed in or ingested, or they can be absorbed through the skin.

Silent Spring most frequently detected the chemicals in upholstered furniture, clothing, and pillow protectors, and the latter two generally contained the highest PFAS levels.

Nearly 20 products contained multiple kinds of PFAS, including PFOA, a highly toxic compound that regulators and industry claim has been phased out because of its danger, but which is still regularly detected in the US. Products that contained PFOA were made in China.

It's difficult for consumers to avoid the chemicals because they aren't listed on tags, but the study provides some helpful hints, Schaider noted. Products labeled "stain resistant" most commonly contained the chemicals as PFAS are often the main ingredient in stain guards like Scotchgard.

"That might mean making a lifestyle decision to live with stains," Schaider said.

Products labeled "waterproof" also frequently contained the chemicals. Navigating "eco" and "green" labels is also difficult because there's no legal definition for the terms, and they can be "meaningless" marketing, Schaider said.

Third party companies will certify products as environmentally safe, but there's no uniform standard and some companies don't consider PFAS in their certification. That's partly because PFAS are a newer chemical than toxins like lead, but Schaider said certifiers "could do a better job".

The best solution, she added, is a ban on PFAS outside of essential uses such as medical devices where there isn't a substitute chemical.

"Where it is just a nice-to-have feature but we don't really need it – all of these textile products fall into that category – it's not worth it to introduce these forever chemicals into the home," Schaider said.

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HEADLINE	05/08 PFAS-contaminated 20M acres cropland
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/08/us-cropland-may-be-contaminated-forever-chemicals-study
GIST	About 20m acres of cropland in the United States may be contaminated from PFAS-tainted sewage sludge that has been used as fertilizer, a new report estimates.

PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of about 9,000 compounds used to make products heat-, water- or stain-resistant. Known as “forever chemicals” because they don’t naturally break down, they have been linked to cancer, thyroid disruption, liver problems, birth defects, immunosuppression and more.

Dozens of industries use PFAS in thousands of consumer products, and often discharge the chemicals into the nation’s sewer system.

The analysis, conducted by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), is an attempt to understand the scope of cropland contamination stemming from sewage sludge, or biosolids. Regulators don’t require sludge to be tested for PFAS or closely track where its spread, and public health advocates warn the practice is poisoning the nation’s food supply.

“We don’t know the full scope of the contamination problem created by PFAS in sludge, and we may never know, because EPA has not made it a priority for states and local governments to track, test and report on,” said Scott Faber, EWG’s legislative policy director.

All sewage sludge is thought to contain the dangerous chemicals, and the compounds have recently been found to be contaminating crops, cattle, water and humans on farms where biosolids were spread.

Sludge is a byproduct of the wastewater treatment process that’s a mix of human excrement and industrial waste, like PFAS, that’s discharged from industry’s pipes. Sludge disposal can be expensive so the waste management industry is increasingly repackaging it as fertilizer because excrement is rich in plant nutrients.

EWG found Ohio keeps the most precise records of any state, and sludge has been applied to 5% of its farmland since 2011. Extrapolating that across the rest of the country would mean about 20m acres are contaminated with at least some level of PFAS. Faber called the estimate “conservative”.

EPA records show over 19bn pounds of sludge has been used as fertilizer since 2016 in the 41 states where the agency tracks the amount of sludge that’s spread, but not the location. It’s estimated that 60% of the nation’s sludge is spread on cropland or other fields annually.

The consequences are evident in the only two states to consistently check sludge and farms for PFAS contamination. In Maine, PFAS-tainted fields have already forced several farms to shut down. The chemicals end up in crops and cattle, and the public health toll exacted by contaminated food in Maine is unknown. Meanwhile, the state is investigating about 700 more fields for PFAS pollution.

“There’s no easy way to shop around this problem,” Faber said. “We shouldn’t be using PFAS-contaminated sludge to grow food and feed for animals.”

Michigan faces a similar situation as it uncovers contaminated beef and farms, and growing evidence links sludge to public health problems and contaminated drinking water.

The health cost of using sludge outweighs the benefits, advocates say. Many have questioned the sense in spending billions of dollars to pull sludge out of water only to inject the substance into the nation’s food supply, and calls for a ban on the practice are growing louder.

“The EPA could today require treatment plants to test sludge for PFAS and warn farmers that they may be contaminating fields, but it has refused to do so,” Faber said.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Brazil Amazon deforestation record levels
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/record-after-record-brazils-amazon-deforestation-hits-april-high-nearly-double-previous-peak

GIST	<p>Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon surged to record levels for the month of April, nearly doubling the area of forest removed in that month last year – the previous April record – preliminary government data has shown, alarming environmental campaigners.</p> <p>In the first 29 days of April, deforestation in the region totalled 1,012.5 square km (390 square miles), according to data from national space research agency Inpe on Friday. The agency, which has compiled the monthly data series since 2015/2016, will report data for the final day of April next week.</p> <p>April is the third monthly record this year, after new highs were also observed in January and February.</p> <p>Destruction of the Brazilian Amazon in the first four months of the year also hit a record for the period of 1,954 square km (754 square miles), an increase of 69% compared to the same period of 2021, clearing an area more than double the size of New York City.</p> <p>Deforestation in the Amazon has soared since rightwing president Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019 and weakened environmental protection. Bolsonaro argues that more farming and mining in the Amazon will reduce poverty in the region.</p> <p>“The cause of this record has a first and last name: Jair Messias Bolsonaro,” said Marcio Astrini, head of Brazilian advocacy group Climate Observatory, in a statement. Bolsonaro’s office directed questions to the ministries of environment and justice.</p> <p>The ministries said in a joint statement the government was making major efforts to fight environmental crimes and that police and environmental authorities were cooperating on an operation to combat deforestation in five Amazon states.</p> <p>Even with deforestation already on the rise, Climate Observatory said its analysts were astounded by such a high reading in April, which is part of the rainy season when the muddy forest is harder for loggers to access.</p> <p>Preservation of the Amazon is vital to stopping catastrophic climate change because of the vast amount of climate-warming carbon dioxide it absorbs.</p> <p>Ane Alencar, science director of the Amazon Environmental Research Institute , said she had expected deforestation to keep rising ahead of the October presidential election, like it has in Brazil’s past three election years, as officials wary of angering voters generally do less to enforce the law. Still, she called the surge in deforestation last month “absurd.”</p> <p>“It seems that the clearing of forests has become institutionalised in the country as something common, with record after record,” Alencar said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 NWS confirms 2 tornadoes in Spokane
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/weather/possible-tornado-spokane/293-4512b822-8fbb-44e5-acf7-be8f27a7dfa9
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — A strong storm cell that moved through the Spokane area Friday night brought heavy rain, winds, thunder and lightning, and a confirmed two tornadoes.</p> <p>The tornadoes touched down between 7:00 p.m. and 7:25 p.m. in the Spokane area. According to the National Weather Storm Survey, the first tornado touched down three miles Northeast of Airway Heights at approximately 7:03 p.m., leading to tree and powerline damage in the area.</p> <p>The second tornado touched down in Spokane Valley between Freya and Dishman Hills Recreational Area around 7:20 p.m., impacting a mobile home park. Several trees were uprooted with a couple of trailers overturned.</p>

	<p>NSW says they will be surveying storm damage through out the afternoon. They will release an official tornado rating sometime in the coming days. These tornadoes are the first the region has seen since 2016.</p> <p>Videos and photos shared by viewers show the swirling winds and damage across the area.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 CDC investigates hepatitis case in WA
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/cdc-investigating-hepatitis-case-in-washington
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Health experts are puzzled over an outbreak of unexplained cases of hepatitis in children that has impacted kids around the world, including here in the U.S. and Washington state.</p> <p>The CDC recently sent out a health alert to state health officials about the ongoing investigation into those cases.</p> <p>"Fifteen days ago, the CDC issued a nationwide health alert to notify clinicians and public health authorities about an investigation involving 9 children in Alabama, identified between October of 2021 and February of 2022, with hepatitis, or inflammation of the liver and Adenovirus infection," said Jay Butler, M.D., Deputy Director for Infectious Diseases, CDC.</p> <p>"All nine ultimately tested positive for Adenovirus, which is a common virus which typically causes mile cold or flu-like symptoms or stomach and intestinal problems," said Butler.</p> <p>"The symptoms of a significant infection with hepatitis usually have to do with the belly," said Frank Bell, Pediatric Infectious Disease Physician, Swedish. "Belly pains, sometimes fever, often diarrhea and vomiting."</p> <p>Bell says it's understandable that parents would be concerned about the CDC's investigation of the 109 hepatitis cases of unknown origin in children across the country.</p> <p>"We see a lot of hepatitis, most of it is pretty mild. What we have been alerted to in the last couple of weeks, but going on for a few months now, is a more serious or more intense inflammation of the liver which seems to be affecting younger children," he said.</p> <p>The CDC recently announced the expansion of that investigation to include at least one case in Washington.</p> <p>"We are doing more testing," Bell said.</p> <p>Local doctors say they are now on the lookout for Adenovirus, which the CDC said was present in the cases in Alabama and some of the other hepatitis cases under investigation.</p> <p>"This is early stage in all these investigations, especially the more recent ones. W2e don't know of all those children who have come to our attention, with signs or symptoms that might be consistent with hepatitis, said Bell. "We don't know which of those might be related to this particular outbreak and which are part of just the regular infections that go on in preschool-aged children all the time."</p> <p>"With Adenovirus infections, these children seem to be developing vomiting and diarrhea," said Dr. Pamela Valentino, Medical Director of Hepatology and Liver Transplantation at Seattle Children's Hospital.</p> <p>Valentino says the Adenovirus is very common, but the CDC is investigating whether something has changed.</p> <p>"It just seems like an exaggerated response that's going on," said Valentino.</p>

"We received a number of reports of similar illnesses from health care providers and state health departments across the country and we have been working diligently to evaluate these reports," said Butler.

The CDC wouldn't say how many cases were under investigation in Washington. The Washington State Department of Health's spokesperson, Teresa McCallion told Fox 13 Friday, "We are aware of the situation and are actively investigating."

"When someone develops liver disease that's causing failure we get more worried in those instances when children develop yellow eyes, that's the best place to look," said Valentino.

Valentino says if a child isn't feeling well, or is getting dehydrated, it may be a good idea to go to an urgent care setting if you can't access a pediatrician. She did have some reassuring words for parents and caregivers.

"When new illnesses arise that have a lot of uncertainty, we all get a little worried. In general, this is a small number of patients," said Valentino.

"This is still an extremely rare phenomenon," said Bell.

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) sent out a statement Friday afternoon, saying it is, "Working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify children with hepatitis of an unknown cause."

The statement went on to say, "Investigators are examining a possible relationship to adenovirus type 41 infection. DOH is in the process of conducting a retrospective analysis of pediatric cases involving hepatitis or adenovirus infections. This is an evolving situation, and we will provide additional details as they become available."

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/09 Alarming: more guns stolen out of cars
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/guns-are-stolen-cars-alarming-trend-nation-rcna26691
GIST	<p>More guns are being stolen out of vehicles in many U.S. cities, according to a new data analysis, which was first obtained and independently verified by NBC News. It's an alarming trend as shootings rise nationwide, propelled in large part by firearms obtained illegally.</p> <p>From 2019 to 2020, at least 180 cities saw a rise in gun thefts from vehicles, which now makes up the largest source of stolen guns, according to the nonprofit Everytown for Gun Safety. The study analyzed FBI crime data from 2011 to 2020, spanning up to 271 small-to-large cities across 38 states.</p> <p>The nonprofit, which advocates gun violence prevention, found that in 2020, an estimated 77,000 guns were reported stolen in these 271 cities alone. Of those, more than half were taken out of vehicles — a stark difference from a decade ago, when the majority of gun thefts were from burglaries and less than a quarter were from cars, according to Everytown.</p> <p>On Aug. 3, 2021, Caroline Schollaert was inside her Jacksonville, Florida, home when she witnessed a man breaking into her car.</p> <p>Known by many for her fearless disposition, Schollaert, an off-duty U.S. Coast Guard member, reported the burglary by phone to the local sheriff's office, then walked outside and confronted the man at gunpoint herself.</p>

She ordered him to stay put until authorities arrived. But while she was still on the phone with a police dispatcher, the suspect pulled out a gun of his own and opened fire. Schollaert, 26, who had just gotten engaged three days earlier, died from her injuries.

The handgun used to kill her, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office said, had been stolen from an unlocked vehicle in the same neighborhood 11 days before the shooting.

"It's helpless," said her father, Patrick Schollaert. "Imagine what it would be like to lose a child over something as simple as locking a door?"

On the night before the shooting, at least eight other auto burglaries were reported in Jacksonville, the sheriff's office said. In 2021, 661 guns were stolen from vehicles in the city, a 4 percent increase from 2019, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office said.

The trend can be seen in states and cities across the country. In South Carolina, gun thefts from motor vehicles climbed to more than 5,100 in 2021, from roughly 4,200 in 2019, according to the statewide data provided by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division. In Hampton, Virginia, the number of motor vehicle larcenies in which a firearm was stolen jumped to 142 incidents in 2021, from 88 in 2019, Police Chief Mark Talbot said. Many of the stolen firearms have turned up at crime scenes.

"It is exceedingly rare that we investigate a gun crime, and the gun was possessed lawfully," Talbot said. "Very often we find out it was taken from a theft from auto."

While it's too soon to definitively say what's driving the shift, experts said it's likely exacerbated by many factors, including a surge in firearm purchases during the pandemic. In 2020, the FBI conducted nearly 40 million firearm background checks, more than any year on record, according to the agency's data. During that time, experts said, Covid also kept more people at home and made easier targets of unoccupied and less-used cars.

"Criminals are opportunists," Everytown president John Feinblatt said. "They'll go where they think that they can capture guns and flood the black market with little or less risk."

In Hampton, Talbot said the surge in gun thefts from vehicles occurred as home burglaries declined. And because the vast majority of targeted cars are unlocked, criminals are "in and out of a particular vehicle in seconds."

"It's not minutes," he said. "It's seconds."

Laws vary by state

After a weeklong manhunt for Caroline Schollaert's killer, Tyree Levon Parker turned himself in and was arrested for second-degree murder, authorities said. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office said the suspected gunman had been going through the neighborhood checking door handles.

Parker, 23, who pleaded not guilty, faces up to life in prison and his trial could begin as early as March 2023, according to prosecutors and his attorney All Chipperfield.

But Patrick Schollaert, 57, a strong Second Amendment supporter and a gun owner himself, thinks there should also be legal ramifications for the person who left their handgun in an unlocked car.

"They ought to be sharing cells," he said. "That's my frustration."

Most states do not have laws that specify how a firearm should be stored inside an unoccupied vehicle. Among the few that do, California and Connecticut require gun owners to securely store firearms in unattended vehicles, while Massachusetts and Oregon have laws requiring all firearms to be stored in a

locked container or with a lock in place when they're not in use in all locations, including vehicles, according to Allison Anderman, senior counsel with the Giffords Law Center.

In Florida, gun owners 18 years old and older are generally allowed to keep a concealed firearm inside a privately owned vehicle, without a license, if the firearm is "securely encased," such as in an unlocked glove compartment, or "otherwise not readily accessible for immediate use."

And when it comes to reporting lost or stolen guns, only 15 states require gun owners to report incidents, according to Everytown. That means the number of nationwide gun thefts is likely significantly higher, the group said.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee — where drivers are not required by law to store their guns in any certain way, according to city officials — the number of reported incidents of gun thefts from vehicles grew to 347 in 2020, from 279 in 2019 and 264 in 2018.

"This surfeit of guns, illegal guns in particular, is just pouring gas on the fire," Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly said.

While there isn't reliable data to show how often stolen guns are used in crimes, several police chiefs and public officials said they've recovered enough illegal firearms at scenes of violent crimes to know it happens frequently.

"People aren't stealing guns out of cars to collect them," Kelly said, adding that he has surveillance footage showing would-be burglars pulling on his vehicle's locked door handles in the driveway of his own home.

Meanwhile, some jurisdictions have made it harder on law enforcement to combat gun thefts, especially from cars. This March, West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice approved a bill that makes it legal for drivers to carry loaded long guns in motor vehicles. And up until recently, gun owners in Philadelphia used to be required to report to police when a firearm is stolen within 24 hours after the discovery. In February, a court said the city's ordinance was unenforceable.

"The way people have such a lack of concern over something so dangerous, it just blows me away," Patrick Schollaert said. "A simple responsibility should not be an arguable point."

In many areas, law enforcement agencies are left to implore residents to lock their vehicles and remove their firearms before exiting.

"We have been extremely vocal here," said W.H. Holbrook, the police chief in Columbia, South Carolina, where 73 percent of guns reported stolen this year came from auto break-ins and 68 percent came from unsecured vehicles.

"Our pleas for properly securing firearms often falls on deaf ears," Holbrook said.

Everytown said cities in states with particularly weak gun laws are associated with greater rates of gun thefts from cars. Without tougher restrictions on storing firearms and reporting lost and stolen guns, its researchers said these warnings will go unheard or ignored.

"There's never been a more urgent time to act," said Megan O'Toole, Everytown's deputy research director. "With every gun stolen from a car, there are rising chances that that gun will be used in a violent crime."

A senseless loss

As he grieves, Patrick Schollaert is trying to keep the memory of his daughter alive. For the last eight years, he said, Caroline Schollaert served with the U.S. Coast Guard and was often the first to show up to the base every morning.

Return to Top	<p>She was a maintenance technician, who worked with a special unit that intercepted high-speed boats suspected of smuggling drugs into the country, her father said. She was also a strong advocate for women in the service.</p> <p>“She made sure that when a young woman came out of boot camp, they wouldn’t get picked on, that they were treated fairly, that they knew they had friends,” her father said.</p> <p>Three days before she was killed, Patrick Schollaert was on the speakerphone with his daughter as her boyfriend, whom she met in the Coast Guard, asked her to marry him. The proposal caught both Patrick Schollaert and his daughter off guard, but it immediately filled him with pride and joy.</p> <p>“I can’t walk her down the aisle,” he said, as he broke down in tears. “It changed my life forever. It robbed me of my girl.”</p> <p>This year, the Schollaert family launched the Caroline Joy Schollaert Memorial Scholarship, which will give \$1,000 every year to one graduating senior who shows outstanding leadership skills and academic excellence at Powhatan High School in Virginia, where Caroline Schollaert attended.</p> <p>Patrick Schollaert said helping others the way his daughter would have done keeps him going. But when it comes to gun thefts from cars, he is not hopeful much will change.</p> <p>“This is going to affect more than just the isolated person like me,” he said. “More and more people are going to be grieving like me, senselessly.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Philippines: 2M children face online abuse
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/09/asia/philippines-election-online-sexual-abuse-as-equals-intl-cmd/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Filipinos are going to the ballot box today to elect a new president, who will replace controversial leader Rodrigo Duterte.</p> <p>The new leader will have many "existential" challenges to address. It is, however, uncertain how high up the list the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children will be -- if at all. None of the leading candidates for the top job have made this topic an election issue, despite a 2021 report that labelled the country "the center of child sex abuse materials production in the world." The report concluded that children in the Philippines are at risk for online sexual exploitation for reasons including "free online connectivity, the widespread use of cellphones, the irresponsible use of technology."</p> <p>In a country whose economy has become heavily reliant on providing business process outsourcing services -- among them content moderation for social media platforms where these exploitations generally take place -- and where there are active efforts to digitize the economy and communications, will the new leader be able to keep capital coming in while at the same time safeguarding Filipino children?</p> <p>2 million children subjected on online abuse and exploitation</p> <p>In the same month Duterte's presidency began in 2016, the United Nations agency dedicated to child safety and rights, UNICEF, called the Philippines "the global epicenter of the live-stream sexual abuse trade." Yet, it wasn't until this year that the Filipino House of Representatives approved the Anti-Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children Bill, which seeks to prohibit all forms of sexual abuse or exploitation of children, including online abuse.</p> <p>Prior to the House passing the bill in January, the Senate had passed its own version last year. Since January, the two chambers have deliberated on the final provisions, which is expected to be ratified later this month, according to the bill's backers. After both chambers ratify the reconciled version, it will be sent to the president for his signature.</p>

UNICEF had, in its 2016 report, warned that 8 out of 10 children in the Philippines were vulnerable to being victims of online sexual abuse or bullying. A more recent report, published in [April 2022](#) found that in the year leading up to publication, "20% of internet-using children aged 12-17 in the Philippines were victims of grave instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This includes being blackmailed to engage in sexual activities, someone sharing their sexual images without permission, or being coerced to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts."

In an introduction to the report from the Department of Social Welfare and Development and UNICEF, 2 million Filipino children were said to have been "subjected to Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation". Online sexual abuse and exploitation of Children in the Philippines -- which UNICEF says in almost all reported cases involves "the production of child sex abuse materials, including live streaming of child sex abuse" -- is very gendered; a [2020 study](#) conducted by the International Justice Mission (IJM) found 86% of victims of abuse were girls.

The reasons for this high prevalence are complex and vary from the [personal](#) (for example, children who experience bullying are more likely to turn to online "friends") to the familial (i.e. the level of poverty in the household or access to devices and the internet) and finally, the societal, which covers issues ranging from the "[inefficiency](#) of governmental poverty-reduction programs" to "the [absence of perceived conflict](#) between sexual exploitation and significant social norms."

Explaining these social norms, Jean Encinas Franco, Associate Professor of political science at the University of Philippines told CNN: "Filipinos often think that online sexual abuse is not harmful because the predator is not touching the children in reality. So, it doesn't matter."

As to why girls are overwhelmingly affected, Encinas Franco added: "It is likely the case that in rural or provincial states which report high cases of online sexual abuse, young boys often go to the farms or help fathers with scavenging goods from garbage. The girls, on the other hand, stay at home."

Exposing tensions between human rights and economic development

Dealing with sexual abuse and exploitation in the Philippines is complicated further by the importance of tech companies to the Philippine economy.

First, the [expansion of digitalization efforts](#), which include building the infrastructure for digital payments, can also facilitate [cybercrime](#). The National Study on Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Philippines, published in July 2021, [noted](#): "Online payment facilities offered by banks and electronic payment services by mobile phone companies are surfacing as the new mode of monetary exchange for the conduct of OSAEC-related activities."

More contentiously, most of the researchers and campaigners CNN spoke to felt that the Philippine government wasn't doing enough to hold the social media platforms companies accountable because of the reliance of the economy on business process outsourcing (BPO) services.

"The reason for this inaction has, quite frankly, to do with the tension between human rights and neoliberal development models in the Philippines," Alden Sajor Marte-Wood, an assistant professor at Rice University who studies the BPO industry, told CNN.

The BPO industry, also referred to as IT-business process management (IT-BPM), is made up of firms offering outsourced services such as payroll management, accounting, telemarketing, data recording, social media marketing, customer support or content moderation. This huge industry in the Philippines provides services for many of the same online platforms that have been used by those who exploit children.

After decades of encouraging foreign direct investment, a [2020 market report](#) identified the IT-BPM industry as the largest employer in the Philippines, accounting for 1.3 million jobs, and contributing billions of dollars a year to the country's gross domestic product. The report referred to the industry as a "pillar of the Philippine economy".

According to the [2022 Roadmap](#) from the IT-Business Processing Association of the Philippines, the sector is expected to generate \$40 billion in revenues, 7.6 million direct and indirect jobs, 250,000 jobs outside of the National Capital Region and cover 15% of the total global outsourcing market by the end of 2022.

It is this reliance on the same platforms where so many of these harms take place, that has prompted some to question how effective the new bill will be if it becomes law, as expected.

"The bill represents something of a paradox: it is an attempt to hold online platforms accountable for their role in facilitating online sexual abuse in a country with a domestic economy heavily dependent on the outsourcing of IT-BPO labor like social media content moderation from the global north." Marte-Wood told CNN.

Father Shay Cullen, the founder of PREDA Foundation, a charitable organization which rescues and helps sexually and physically abused children in the Philippines recover, told CNN that the internet service providers also pose a problem. He said he has been campaigning for companies to adhere to already existing legislation: 2009's Anti-Child Pornography Law which demands that internet service providers install software to block circulation of child pornography on the internet.

Internet service providers are "a very powerful lobby in the country" Father Cullen said, adding that in his experience, these companies would rather pay fines than respect the law.

When the Philippines National Telecommunications Commission in February 2021 [issued 'show cause' orders](#) against 47 internet service providers for their failure to block child pornography, the companies said other laws, such as the Data Privacy Act, prevent them from monitoring websites.

Attorney Antoni Pauline Pascual, state counsel in the Philippines Department of Justice's Office of Cybercrime, suggested that the reason for the perceived inaction on the part of the state to hold the social media platforms accountable for online sexual exploitation is because they need these social platforms' help to curb the violence. Pascual told CNN: "There have been no adversarial actions taken against the online platforms [where] child abuse happens or where such materials are distributed as their cooperation is vital to conduct investigations of perpetrators."

Jaye de la Cruz Bekema, an attorney in the office of Senator Risa Hontiveros who drafted the legislation, acknowledged that "there were a few proposals from industry that would have the effect of limiting their liability, but these proposals did not make it to the final draft." She described conversations with online platforms as in large part collaborative and helpful, which she hopes will make the law easier to implement for whomever comes in as the next president of the Philippines. "Our bill went through a process of heavy stakeholder consultations, primarily with implementors on the ground," she told CNN.

The bill is likely to be the last one to be signed by Philippines' [outgoing president and strongman Rodrigo Duterte](#).

Despite the prevalence of online sexual abuse, the [leading contender](#) in the presidential race -- [Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr](#) -- has not made this a key election issue. The [focus](#), Encinas-Franco says, has predominantly been on pandemic recovery, how to deal with high inflation and equally high unemployment rates.

Also running for president is current Vice President Leni Robredo who has [spoken on the campaign trail](#) about providing economic opportunities for survivors of gender-based violence.

Robredo's daughter own daughter is currently embroiled in a scandal in which [allegedly fake](#) videos of her "in a scandalous pose or act" are currently being circulated on porn sites and on social media platforms. While a letter from the young woman's lawyers to the National Bureau of Investigation says they are asking for the matter to be investigated not just for this victim "but for all those who could be victimized

by these online predators", Leni Robredo hasn't drawn attention to the new bill or to the need for accountability of the social media platforms which form a large chunk of the BPO services that Filipinos earn their livelihoods from.

Whoever wins the presidential race, Marte-Wood remains sceptical. He doubts "change in presidential administration can adequately address these fundamental tensions between platform capitalism and human rights in the Philippines," he told CNN, adding that there is a "very real possibility of capital flight or economic retaliation from these same platforms -- the very companies that have now become central drivers of the BPO industry in the Philippines."

Holding the right people accountable

While the [Senate's version](#) of the bill has 21 actions that have been listed as unlawful or prohibited in the Anti-Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children Bill -- can any of them be used to hold social media companies and tech companies whose infrastructure is used to facilitate sexual abuse and exploitation accountable?

Encinas Franco believes the new legislation could instead criminalize mothers who despite often acting as facilitators for the crime, (the [2020 IJM report](#) found 66% of the traffickers were women and 41% were biological parents), are also themselves victims of a society where their opportunities to earn a living, come out of poverty and live equally are limited.

"Though a great initiative, this bill, I worry, might become somewhat a little like Duterte's [war on drugs](#): catch whoever you can, to show the accomplishment," Encinas Franco said. Unless online sexual abuse is looked at as a systemic problem and more people find other sources of livelihood opportunities, she said, "I doubt the problem would be completely eradicated."

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HEADLINE	05/08 Portland arrest: houses of worship crimes
SOURCE	https://www.kake.com/story/46442779/suspect-in-crimes-at-portland-houses-of-worship-arrested
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Oregon (KPTV) -- Portland Police say they have arrested 34-year-old Michael Bivins in connection with vandalism and an arson attempt at places of worship across the city. Bivens is being held at the Multnomah County Detention Center on several charges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Criminal mischief in the third degree for breaking a window Congregation Shir Tikvah on April 30.-Criminal mischief in the third degree for putting graffiti on the synagogue of Congregation Beth Israel on May 2.-Arson in the first degree (Measure 11) for trying to start a fire in the occupied mosque of the Muslim Community Center of Portland on May 3.-Criminal mischief in the first degree for throwing a large rock through a library window at Congregation Beth Israel on May 4. <p>Bivins has been identified as a onetime freelance journalist who covered political extremism in Portland until 2019.</p> <p>"Our arson investigator got involved in the case and since then she has been chasing this suspect and connecting him to other incidents," said Kevin Allen of PPB. "So we know the incidents go back to April 30th at this point and she is still working to see if there are any other cases that might be related."</p> <p>On Wednesday, Bivins came by the Fox 12 station asking to speak to a reporter. He said he was the one vandalizing places of worship, gave names and locations of places he had been to and vandalized, and said he would not stop committing these crimes before stating he would come back to the station Friday afternoon.</p>

After he left the station, Fox 12 contacted authorities, sharing the information he had provided. Meanwhile, police say he went back to Beth Israel and threw a large rock through a library window.

“We were notified by Beaverton Police that they had been contacted by KPTV about this guy showing up and claiming that he was involved and apparently wanted to talk to a reporter on that topic,” said Allen. “The Beaverton Police detective recognized that this might be a pretty important clue. They contacted our detective and developed a plan to get him into custody.”

On Friday, Bivins was arrested as he was making his way back to the Fox 12 station.

“This is certainly noteworthy that someone would contact a news station and want to discuss crimes they committed,” said Allen. “I’m not sure what the motivation there was, but we are certainly grateful to you and KPTV for working with our investigators so we could get him arrested, get him into custody and find appropriate charges for him. It’s important to note too that this is early in the investigation. I know the detective is continuing to work on what charges could be appropriate and we could be putting more charges forth going forward.”

Portland Police say they are in contact with federal authorities about this investigation and additional charges are possible.

“I certainly cannot remember another case quite like this. It’s certainly unusual behavior for a suspect. It will be interesting to see as the investigation proceeds how this all plays out. We always remind folks an arrest is actually not the end of a case. There’s still a lot of work to be done,” said Allen. “This whole idea of someone putting graffiti and trying to burn down a house of worship and breaking windows, this is terrifying for members of our community. So we put a lot of effort and emphasis into this investigation because we really wanted to end this behavior that is causing so much fear in our community.”

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HEADLINE	05/09 Police: 6 shot, 3 fatally at Atlanta condo
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-6-shot-3-fatally-at-a-greater-atlanta-condo-complex/
GIST	<p>ATLANTA (AP) — A shooting at a greater Atlanta condominium complex has left three people dead and three others wounded, police said, adding no arrests were immediately made.</p> <p>Police in Dekalb County said the six people were shot Sunday night at the complex near Clarkston, a community in a suburb east of Atlanta.</p> <p>Lt. Shane Smith, a county police spokesman, told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that people calling 911 reported shots fired shortly before 8 p.m. Sunday at the Brandon Hill condominium complex and that arriving officers found five people had been shot, three fatally.</p> <p>The newspaper report added that the two wounded persons were taken to hospitals with serious injuries and a sixth shooting victim arrived later at a hospital in the area. The condition of the sixth victim wasn’t immediately known and police did not immediately release the names of the victims or other details of what had happened.</p> <p>Smith told the newspaper that no suspect or suspects were in custody later Sunday night following the shooting, adding police detectives were interviewing witnesses and collecting evidence.</p> <p>A dispatcher handling after-hours police calls early Monday told The Associated Press she had no statement or additional information for immediate release.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Europe role for meth, cocaine changing
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SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/europes-changing-role-in-meth-and-cocaine-production-and-trafficking/
GIST	<p>Europe's role in international drug production and trade is changing, according to new analyses by Europol and the EU drugs agency (EMCDDA). In an in-depth look at the cocaine and methamphetamine markets, the agencies point to increased production activities in Europe and how collaboration between criminal groups worldwide is creating new security threats and expanding the market.</p> <p>The new analyses cover trends along the supply chain from production and trafficking to distribution and use. They describe a large and expanding cocaine market and a currently small, but steadily growing, methamphetamine market in the EU. They also warn of the heightened threat posed by innovation in production processes and chemical precursors, and a growing range of products that may be hazardous to consumers.</p> <p>"The trade in illegal drugs continues to dominate serious and organized crime in the EU, and nearly 40 % of the criminal networks operating at the international level reported to Europol are active in drug trafficking," Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle stresses. "Fighting this illegal trade is a key priority for Europol and the EU. This analysis supports us in understanding the market dynamics and is crucial for formulating effective law enforcement responses".</p> <p>"Our new analyses show that we are now facing a growing threat from a more diverse and dynamic drug market, that is driven by closer collaboration between European and international criminal organizations," adds EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel. "This has resulted in record levels of drug availability, rising violence and corruption, and greater health problems. In response, we need to be even more sensitive to signals coming from the market and invest in greater coordinated action, not only in Europe, but also with our international partners in producer and transit countries".</p> <p>Europe is a major synthetic drug producing region, both for domestic and external markets. Increasingly, it is also a key trans-shipment point for drugs originating elsewhere and destined for other world regions. For both cocaine and methamphetamine, there is evidence that Latin American and European criminal groups are partnering in production, trafficking and distribution.</p> <p>These new findings draw on data and information from the EMCDDA's drug monitoring system and on Europol's operational intelligence on organized crime. Taking a threat assessment approach, the agencies present key areas for action at EU and Member State level. These include: rapidly identifying emerging health and security threats, investing in forensic and toxicological capacity to keep pace with innovation, targeting the illicit drug supply chain and reducing vulnerabilities at external borders.</p> <p>Cocaine</p> <p>The analysis shows that the European cocaine market is expanding, driven by unprecedented levels of trafficking leading to historically high availability. High levels of cocaine production in South America have resulted in record quantities seized in Europe. Europe is also a destination and transit zone for cocaine bound for the Middle East and Asia. More production is also now taking place inside Europe, indicating changes in the region's role in the international cocaine trade. A large variety of individuals and criminal networks shape the complex supply of cocaine to, and within, the EU. The potential for new smokable cocaine products to emerge on the market raises concerns about future health risks.</p> <p>Cocaine is the second most commonly consumed illicit drug in the EU after cannabis, with a market retail value in 2020 estimated at EUR 10.5 billion (range EUR 7.7 billion to 12.8 billion). Around 3.5 million Europeans (15–64 years) report having used the drug in the past year, 14 million in their lifetime. While cocaine use remains concentrated in the south and west of Europe, the market appears to be spreading eastward.</p> <p>For the fourth consecutive year, record amounts of cocaine (214.6 tonnes) were seized in Europe in 2020, a 6 % increase from 2019, suggesting high availability of the drug. Three countries — Belgium (70 t), the Netherlands (49 t) and Spain (37 t) — accounted for around three-quarters of the European total, but large quantities were also seized by Italy (13.4 t), France (13.1 t), Germany (11 t) and Portugal (10 t). Most</p>

cocaine seized in Europe arrives in maritime shipping containers. Entry points of cocaine shipments are diversifying, with greater amounts seized in ports in Eastern Europe and Turkey.

Most cocaine manufacturing still takes place in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru. The new analysis describes, however, how cocaine processing is now taking place inside Europe (mainly in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands). Large quantities of chemical precursors used in cocaine production have been seized from illicit production laboratories and at European borders. Recent data also suggest that large amounts of cocaine powder have been processed in Europe from intermediary products, such as coca paste and cocaine base. Some of these are smuggled from South America in carrier materials (e.g. charcoal, plastics) and then extracted in specialized facilities. Availability in Europe of large amounts of cocaine base and coca paste creates a risk of new smokable cocaine products (e.g. 'crack') emerging on European consumer markets, posing considerable health and social risks.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine — the most widely consumed synthetic stimulant drug in the world — still plays a relatively small role in Europe's drug market. Nevertheless, the latest analysis shows the growing threat posed by this drug in the region, as availability increases and use spreads to new areas. Methamphetamine is produced inside the EU to supply both domestic and external markets. Europe is also a destination and transit zone for this drug from other production hubs (e.g. Iran, Nigeria, Mexico) bound for Asia and Oceania. The emerging methamphetamine industry in Afghanistan poses a threat to the EU, given competitive prices and long-established drug trafficking routes to Europe.

The analysis shows that long-term trends point to a steady market expansion. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of methamphetamine seizures in the EU 27 more than doubled (from 3,000 to 6,200), while the quantities seized increased by 477 % to 2.2 tonnes in 2020 (EU 27).

In 2020, nine EU Member States reported the dismantling of 215 methamphetamine laboratories.

Historically production in Europe typically occurred in small, but widespread, 'kitchen' laboratories in Czechia and its neighboring countries. While these still exist, there is now growing concern about production facilities located in Belgium and the Netherlands, where methamphetamine can be produced on a considerably larger scale.

Methamphetamine facilities detected in Belgium and the Netherlands have increased in size, sophistication and output since 2019. Recognizing the profitability of methamphetamine, European synthetic drug producers are now seen to be working with Mexican criminal groups to develop production processes and exploit existing infrastructure in Europe. In addition to methamphetamine produced in Europe, multi-tonne quantities of the drug originating in Mexico have been seized in the EU since 2019, also implying collaboration between European and Mexican criminal networks.

Methamphetamine use in Europe has historically been concentrated in Czechia and Slovakia, but use appears to be spreading elsewhere. Latest wastewater data reveal that the drug is also present in Belgium, Cyprus, the east of Germany, Spain, Turkey and several northern European countries (e.g. Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway). Of the 58 cities with data on methamphetamine residues in municipal wastewater for 2020 and 2021, around a half (27) reported an increase.

With greater amounts of methamphetamine present on the European market, there is concern around increased demand for the drug, particularly in its smokable form ('crystal meth'). This could have long-term implications, including a greater burden on health systems and a threat to public safety.

Cross-cutting themes

While established criminal networks often manage their own activities, others now outsource a range of services along the supply chain. Today's analyses show how logistical support has become a parallel business, with some criminal groups specialized in providing the chemicals, equipment and expertise needed to set up and operate production facilities. Analysis of encrypted criminal communications, through recent high-profile operations, have shown that trade is often reliant on a web of facilitators and

brokers who connect producers, transporters and distributors. European criminal networks are boosting production efficiency drawing on the know-how of their counterparts in Latin American drug-producing regions.

Violence and corruption, long seen in traditional drug-producing countries, are increasingly seen within the EU. The analyses highlight that, in some EU Member States (Belgium, Spain, France, Netherlands), competition between drug suppliers has intensified, resulting in an increase in violent clashes. The expanding EU cocaine market has brought with it a rise in homicides, kidnappings and intimidation, with violence spilling over to those outside the drug market (e.g. lawyers, government officials, journalists). Meanwhile, the growth of large-scale production of methamphetamine in Europe has the potential to ‘drive more corruption along the supply chain, creating a parallel economy’. Corruption has been identified as a key threat in the EU, with almost 60 % of criminal networks estimated to use corruption as a facilitator.

A prominent cross-cutting theme in today’s findings is the environmental impact of drug production. This includes the dumping of chemical waste, which can result in ecological damage, public safety risks and high clean-up costs. Fatalities have been recorded in synthetic drug production laboratories in Belgium and the Netherlands in recent years, due to fires, explosions or suffocation from carbon monoxide or other toxic fumes.

Despite the unprecedented disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, cocaine and methamphetamine markets in the EU have continued to evolve. Analyses show that COVID-19 restrictions were felt more at retail than wholesale level, where cocaine trafficking via maritime routes continued at pre-pandemic levels. Retail drug markets were disrupted during the early lockdowns, although dealers quickly adapted using new methods (encrypted messaging services, social media apps, online sources and home deliveries). In 2020, methamphetamine was one of the drugs most often seized in postal consignments.

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[Read more at Europol](#)

HEADLINE	05/08 Wisc. anti-abortion group bldg. set on fire
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/08/us/madison-anti-abortion-center-vandalized.html
GIST	<p>The headquarters of an anti-abortion group in Madison, Wis., was set on fire on Sunday morning in an act of vandalism that included the attempted use of a Molotov cocktail and graffiti that read “If abortions aren’t safe then you aren’t either,” according to the police.</p> <p>No one in the group, Wisconsin Family Action, was in the building at the time, and there were no injuries reported. Although the Molotov cocktail that was thrown through a window failed to ignite, the vandal or vandals started another fire nearby, the authorities said. The fire burned part of a wall.</p> <p>The Madison Police Department did not say whether it had made any arrests or whether more than one person was involved.</p> <p>“We have made our federal partners aware of this incident and are working with them and the Madison Fire Department as we investigate this arson,” the department said in a statement.</p> <p>The attack came nearly a week after the leak of a draft ruling by the Supreme Court that would overturn Roe v. Wade, the landmark decision that established a constitutional right to abortion. Wisconsin has a law banning abortions that predates Roe by more than a century, but Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, has said he would block its implementation. Wisconsin Family Action is a nonprofit political advocacy group that promotes conservative policies on several issues, including abortion, within the Wisconsin state government.</p> <p>“There’s nothing we have done to warrant this. We ought to be able to take different sides on issues without fearing for our lives,” said Julaine Applying, the president of Wisconsin Family Action. “Had anybody been in the office, they would have, at a minimum, been hurt.”</p>

The Madison Fire Department first received a call about the fire at around 6 a.m. on Sunday. Firefighters and police officers arrived shortly after and quickly brought the fire under control. Ms. Appling said that she heard about the attack later in the morning while preparing for a Mother's Day brunch at her church in Watertown, Wis.

"I got a call from building management here saying there had been a break-in and a fire started," Ms. Appling said. She then went with a team member to the building, where they discovered "the havoc and property damage."

Ms. Appling said that her office was the main target of the attack. Two windows had been smashed, and water that was used to put out the fire had caused more damage. Ms. Appling said the graffiti was particularly disturbing. "As I drove up to the office and I saw that, my immediate reaction was surprise at how overt the threat was," she said. The graffiti included an anarchist symbol and the numbers 1312, a shorthand for an anti-police slur.

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin also denounced the violence in a statement. "Our work to protect continued access to reproductive care is rooted in love," the group's president, Tanya Atkinson, said. "We condemn all forms of violence and hatred within our communities."

In a statement to The New York Times, Tony Perkins, the president of the Family Research Council, which works with Wisconsin Family Action, attributed the attack to left-wing extremists who aim to intimidate abortion opponents, and he vowed that they would not succeed. "We are grateful for the unwavering leadership of Wisconsin Family Action and the dozens of family policy councils around the country that are committed to the sanctity of all human life," he added.

Ms. Appling said she and others at the organization had received threats in the past and that she knew that some people would be angry after the Supreme Court draft ruling was leaked.

"I knew automatically that anybody that took a position in favor of how the opinion was written should probably be paying more attention to their safety," she said. Still, this kind of direct attack was shocking, and she said it had shaken her sense of safety.

She also said she would be working on implementing new security measures in the office.

In a statement on Sunday, the Madison police chief, Shon Barnes, acknowledged the heightened tensions in the community after the leaked draft and condemned the attack.

"Our department has and continues to support people being able to speak freely and openly about their beliefs," the statement read, "but we feel that any acts of violence, including the destruction of property, do not aid in any cause."

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HEADLINE	05/08 OR prison club convicted killers suspended
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/prison-club-for-oregons-convicted-killers-investigated-for-financial-discrepancies/
GIST	<p>The newsletters provide chatty updates on the wholesome pursuits of a civic-minded club: barbecues, toy drives and backpacks filled with school supplies for children in need.</p> <p>The group spearheads an annual holiday gift giveaway, ensuring that those without families of their own don't feel left out.</p> <p>Its members oversee a six-figure fundraising juggernaut that any PTA president would envy.</p> <p>But this is no Rotary Club.</p>

It's the Lifers' Unlimited Club at the Oregon State Penitentiary where only convicted killers need apply. And now it's in trouble.

Oregon Department of Corrections officials this week confirmed they have halted club activities while they investigate "discrepancies" in its finances.

They also have put a prison employee, Jaime Rodriguez, on paid leave after learning of potential problems with club "oversight," said spokesperson Jennifer Black. Rodriguez, a recreation specialist at the prison, declined to comment when reached by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

The department has suspended the other 10 clubs at the state penitentiary while the inquiry continues, Black said.

The agency has declined to release details about how much money the Lifers' Club takes in – mostly from other prisoners – and what members do with it. The state also has so far declined to turn over internal audits of the group.

A source with direct knowledge of the investigation said it was a recent change in leadership at the penitentiary that led to the review of the 50-year-old club, one of the few of its kind in the nation.

Longtime superintendent, Brandon Kelly, resigned early this year amid an unrelated personnel investigation and corrections officials subsequently discovered potential discrepancies related to the punch card program used by the Lifers' Club. Prisoners could use the cards to buy food and goods sold by the club.

The state penitentiary in Salem has long stood out not only for its robust culture of prisoner-led clubs but also for the unusual autonomy they enjoy.

This is the same prison where in recent years another club convinced officials to allow the installation of an elaborate Japanese garden in the shadow of an imposing cellblock.

Over the years, the Lifers' Club transformed into a thriving business enterprise, selling meals, snacks and personal items like toothbrushes and raincoats to prisoners and using the proceeds to pay for perks, like a coffee machine in the visiting room and improvements to the 18-hole mini golf course on the prison grounds.

It also acted as a philanthropic organization, doling out thousands of dollars every year to local causes.

The Oregonian/OregonLive obtained nearly two years of newsletters and detailed accounting updates published by the club that provide a window into its fundraising prowess.

Club treasurer, Jeff McCarty, convicted in 1996 of aggravated murder in the beating death of 32-year-old Dana Baker in Bend, reported in one update that the club raked in an estimated \$100,000 in revenue in 2020. He noted that the club had spent most of the money on its various projects.

The club's large orders of food, goods and even microwaves put a dent in the agency's revenue from commissary sales. It's unknown how closely prison managers monitored the spending, the source said.

Concerns about the potential for exploitation and abuse of the prison's clubs had circulated among some agency officials for years.

In U.S. prison culture, lifers tend to represent a stabilizing force in a volatile environment, said Christopher M. Campbell, associate professor in the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Portland State University.

“Lifers are typically understood as model prisoners, people who abide by the rules,” he said. “They try to be role models for other adults in custody. They are not going out of their way to snitch on anybody, but they don’t like it when people make life difficult for them.”

But like any organization, including those beyond prison, he said: “There is the potential for nefarious people to rear their heads every now and then, but with the appropriate oversight and checks it is less likely that that occurs.”

‘Important part of prison life’

Before the pandemic disrupted prison activities, the Lifers’ Club met regularly in the penitentiary’s activities hall, a massive space lined with metal cages that serve as offices for social clubs.

Sometimes members brought in guest speakers or prisoners would put on their own presentations, like tips for a successful parole hearing.

“We cannot change the past,” reads its mission statement, “however we believe through rehabilitation ... we can create a more productive future.”

Its goal: Improve the quality of life for “those inside and outside of these walls.”

The club counts among its members some of Oregon’s most notorious criminals, like Christian Longo, 48, who in 2001 killed his wife Mary Jane, 34, and their three children, Zachery, Sadie and Madison.

Also a member: Keith Hunter Jespersen, 67, known as the “Happy Face Killer.” Jespersen has claimed to have committed more than 100 murders; authorities have confirmed eight killings of women in Washington, Oregon, California, Florida, Nebraska and Wyoming.

About 955 people are serving life sentences in Oregon. That includes men and women sentenced to life without parole and others who will at some point be eligible to pursue release. The state penitentiary is home to the largest number of them: 302, roughly 18% of the prison’s population.

According to the Corrections Department, 119 men belong to the Lifers’ Club; the group’s constitution caps membership at 150.

The club’s newsletters say its money goes to a variety of enhancements at the prison, like a 40-inch television for a common area, microwaves for a recreation building and a holiday gift giveaway.

“At Christmastime they sit down and put together baskets for every inmate at the Oregon State Penitentiary,” said Roger Martin, a longtime prison volunteer, whose steadfast support of the club earned him the title of honorary member. “A lot of those guys get no contact with anybody.”

He said some of the club’s members have shown they’re more capable of rehabilitation than others.

“The Lifers’ Club is made up of lifers, some of whom are good guys and some of whom are horrible guys,” said Martin, a former Republican lawmaker and lobbyist who represents the Oregon Catholic Conference.

The group also engages in charity, raising money for various causes, from blankets and meals for people living on the streets of Salem to donating about \$2,500 toward local relief efforts after the historic 2020 wildfires.

Last year alone, club accounting records show it donated \$600 to the American Legion to be used to support a Boy Scout troop, sent \$1,500 to a camp for children with incarcerated family members and spent another \$9,000 on 1,000 backpacks and school supplies for area students.

The club's record of charitable donations "speaks to caring about other people that you would not expect from somebody who did something so harmful that they got life without parole," said Lauren Kessler, a professor emerita at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communications and an author who led a writing group at the state penitentiary.

The group teaches leadership and cooperation skills and has become "an important part of prison life" at the state penitentiary, said Kessler, who has written about prisoners in two books, including her latest, "Free: Two Years, Six Lives and the Long Journey Home."

"It does create a kind of, I hesitate to use the word normalcy," she said, "but it does create a kind of camaraderie."

Pop-up barbecues, snow cones

The club newsletters represent a sort of Reader's Digest for the incarcerated.

The editor is Robert P. Langley, 62, convicted of killing Anne L. Gray, 39, and Larry R. Rockenbrant, 24, in separate attacks 34 years ago.

Rockenbrant's body was found buried in a cactus garden on the grounds of the Oregon State Hospital where Langley was a patient; he had received permission to plant the garden as a way to relax.

The bulletins have featured poems, self-help advice, tips on meditation, news about potential sentencing reforms and updates on topics like COVID-19 vaccines and prisoners' eligibility to receive federal stimulus checks.

A running series suggested 100 "books to read before you die." On the list: "Murder on the Orient Express."

The updates reflect the club's entrepreneurial side with promotions for fellow prisoners to buy Starbucks coffee beans (\$10 per bag), Ghirardelli brownie mixes (\$4) and maple-flavored saltwater taffy (\$6 per pound).

The Lifers' Club has even proven to be a powerhouse seller of Girl Scout cookies, according to one of its financial reports. Records show \$3,108 in cookie sales in 2020.

The bulletins have touted upcoming events, like snow cones in the recreation yard — "priced barely above operating costs" at \$1 — and "pop-up" barbecues, which grew so popular that the club installed a freezer to stash larger volumes of meat.

Photographs from one of the barbecues showed men tending a grill, a tall guard tower looming in the background.

Prisoners can make purchases using money they get from family or from their own earnings. In Oregon, people are required to work while incarcerated. According to the Department of Corrections, monthly pay ranges from \$8 to \$82, depending on the hours and nature of the assignment.

Like any business, the club's leaders have had their eye on the future, hoping to develop "new and sustainable revenue streams," one recent newsletter noted, like a coffee cart in the recreation yard.

"It's our goal to continue to build on the relationships that we've established with local businesses in order to offer (prisoners) a variety of fundraiser options at reasonable prices," Langley wrote.

Former lifer, Anthony Pickens, 39, credited the club with showing him what altruism looks like.

Pickens was convicted of murder and sentenced to life with a minimum of 29 years in prison for killing Chad Render, 20, in 1997. Pickens was 15 at the time.

	<p>He said club leaders regularly collected donations for various community causes and many men were eager to chip in.</p> <p>“When you are exposed to what it looks like to give back, the human side of the individual wakes up,” said Pickens, who was released from prison last fall after receiving a commutation from Gov. Kate Brown. “Growing up, I didn’t see that kind of stuff.”</p> <p>Amid the grim reality of prison, the club was seen as a positive force, he said.</p> <p>“There are a lot of guys who have been there 15, 20, 30 years and aren’t going anywhere,” Pickens said. “They are making the existence there a little more comfortable and keeping the violence and altercations down because altercations don’t help those who live there.”</p> <p>Whether the club ends up a casualty of its own success remains to be seen.</p> <p>A Department of Corrections official said Friday the agency does not have a timeline for completing the inquiry.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Tacoma police investigate 2 fatal shootings
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article261224427.html
GIST	<p>Two men were killed in separate overnight shootings in Tacoma, police said Sunday morning. Both incidents are being investigated as homicides, adding to a running tally that puts the city and Pierce County on pace for the highest recorded number of killings in recent history.</p> <p>Initial dispatch calls on the first shooting came at 11:17 p.m. Police responded to multiple reports of shots fired in the area of East 35th and East D Streets. Officers found shell casings in the road, but no sign of victims.</p> <p>Dispatchers soon heard that a man with gunshot wounds had been dropped off at Tacoma General Hospital by a private vehicle shortly after the initial report of shots fired. The man, 24, died from his injuries.</p> <p>The second reported shooting came at 2:49 a.m. Officers responded to the 5400 block of South Tacoma Way, and found a man prone on a sidewalk. He had been shot.</p> <p>Officers started life-saving measures, but the man, 56, was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>Detectives and crime scene technicians were investigating both incidents Sunday and processing evidence, according to a department statement.</p> <p>The two fatal shootings push Pierce County’s annual homicide total to 41 — 21 of those incidents occurred within the city of Tacoma. If the grim pace holds, the city would exceed its historic high of 33, set in 1994.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Colombia cartel retaliates kingpin’s arrest
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/08/gulf-clan-cartel-armed-strike-colombia-otoni-el-dairo-antonio-usuga
GIST	<p>Jorge, a community activist from Colombia’s conflict-ridden Chocó province, was already traveling to the city of Medellín when he heard news that made him turn back towards home.</p> <p>Paramilitary militiamen in balaclavas and military fatigues had thrown up a string of roadblocks and declared an “armed strike”, torching vehicles, forcing businesses to close, and stopping all traffic.</p>

“There’s absolutely no one around, because any vehicle they find on the roads they set on fire,” said Jorge, using a false name to avoid any reprisals. “It’s total terror.”

Since Thursday, cities, towns and villages across northern Colombia have been shut down by the feared Gulf Clan drug cartel, in retaliation for the extradition to the United States of its former leader, Dairo Antonio Úsuga, better known as Otoniel.

Otoniel faces a litany of drug-trafficking charges in the US, as well as over 120 charges in Colombia – including allegations of murder, illegal recruitment, kidnapping for ransom, sexual abuse of minors, terrorism, illegal possession of weapons and drug trafficking.

But even as prosecutors in New York boasted that the alleged kingpin would finally face justice, Colombians across a swath of the country remained hostage to the terror unleashed by his thousands of henchmen.

Militiamen have blocked main roads and forbidden everyone to venture out, even to buy food.

“Everything has been shut down since midday on Thursday, practically every single business is now closed,” said one resident in Apartadó, a city of 200,000 people in the Urabá region, where the Gulf Clan still holds territory.

“We don’t know how long this will go on. The water and power keeps going out, there’s no transport, and food is running low. We just have to wait and see what happens.”

Videos shared by residents with the Guardian show streets that normally teem with commerce were now completely deserted.

“The state has no control here, so in any moment armed groups can make trouble and destabilise the entire region,” said one community leader in Montería, the capital of the province of Córdoba.

“Entire municipalities are shut down, buses have been burned, and nobody can leave their homes.”

A threatening flyer in the name of the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) – the name the cartel uses for itself – have been distributed in several towns, stating that the armed strike will last for four days, and that the cartel will not be held responsible for the “consequences that could be unfavourable”. Shops, schools and government buildings were graffitied with the AGC’s insignia.

“We are the prisoners, not Otoniel,” said another resident of a village in the region. “Everyone is confined to their homes, and nothing – not even an ambulance – moves. This is a silent chaos.”

Otoniel’s capture was hailed by US and Colombian authorities as a major blow against narcotraffickers, but police say that two of his lieutenants, known as Gonzalito and Chiquito Malo, have taken command of the militia, which is believed to have as many as 2,000 fighters, and in addition to drug trafficking is also involved in people trafficking, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and forced recruitment of children.

Colombian authorities have responded to the violence by launching an “anti-terrorism policy”, principally aimed at lifting roadblocks. “The instruction to commanders is to deploy all their capabilities, and especially to be on the offensive against these criminals,” said a police spokesperson on Friday morning.

Analysts say the terror in northern Colombia is a predictable consequence of the country’s hardline tactics in the “war on drugs”, which often overlook civilian populations living among traffickers.

“This is a perfect demonstration of what the problem is with Colombia’s approach to groups like the Clan del Golfo, in the sense that decapitating them with these large-scale, high-profile arrests like that of Otoniel have done nothing to affect the structure of the organisation,” said Elizabeth Dickinson, a Colombia analyst with the International Crisis Group, a thinktank.

	<p>“The daily reality in regions they control or contest continues to involve high levels of social control, a forced recruitment, coercion, extortion.”</p> <p>“All of that is invisible, but in a moment like this, it becomes impossible for the state to ignore the depth of presence of a group like the Clan del Golfo in this region,” Dickinson said. “It’s actually quite shocking.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Wenatchee officer wounded in shooting
SOURCE	https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/local/update-one-person-dead-police-officer-wounded-in-wenatchee-shooting/article_a8f8a988-ce1f-11ec-8fc6-4fbfcb0c1a58.html
GIST	<p>WENATCHEE — One person was killed and one police officer was wounded in a shooting Saturday morning in Wenatchee.</p> <p>Wenatchee police officers responded at about 8:30 a.m. to the Living Hope Community Church at the corner of North Chelan Avenue and Palouse Street to reports of shots fired.</p> <p>There were witnesses to the shooting which took place across the street from the Washington State Apple Blossom Festival Food Fair and Arts Crafts Fair in Memorial Park. Vendors were getting ready to open on the day of the Stemilt Grand Parade.</p> <p>Don Ross and his wife Rodelle, both of Missoula, Montana, were setting up their arts and crafts booth, D&R Creations, about 200 feet away at Memorial Park when they heard a commotion and gunshots at the church.</p> <p>“First we heard a big load of shots and we thought, ‘What’s going on?’” Rodelie Ross said. “And then when I look, I saw that guy yelling and cussing and breaking the window.”</p> <p>She told her husband to look and then he shot the window again.</p> <p>“So I was really alarmed, like ‘Oh my God, he has a gun,’” Rodelie Ross said.</p> <p>A man was “shooting at the door and then kicking it and then cussing and then shooting at it again and then really kicking at it, trying to get in,” Don Ross said. They called 911 at 8:27 a.m.</p> <p>“I dialed 911 and I gave it to him,” Rodelie Ross said. “I was hiding there because I’m scared that, you know, he’s going to come here and try to shoot my husband.”</p> <p>Two officers arrived by bicycle shortly after.</p> <p>“The police arrived and they told him to put the pistol down, and he didn’t comply,” Don Ross said. “And so there was two of them that fired at him and he went down instantly.”</p> <p>He added one officer was shot in the leg “from him shooting back.”</p> <p>Don Ross said the man was “trying to raise (the gun) up and they shot him when he started raising it up.”</p> <p>Rodelie Ross said the the first two officers to arrive were a man and a woman and "told the guy to, you know, ‘put your gun down.’”</p> <p>She said, “I saw the guy try to put his gun down but he got it back again." She said it appeared that he was reloading his gun.</p> <p>And then, “He’s shooting the police officers and the police officers is firing back,” Rodelie Ross said. She added, “It was really quick. Like, he just got down really quick.”</p>

Don Ross described the man as a white man roughly 40 years old. "He was dressed very nicely, nice pants, had a tie on."

He wasn't certain how many times the man fired his gun into the church. He said he believes police fired at the man about six times.

The man was "killed instantly," Don Ross said.

"I went over there a little way before they put up the ribbon and they had a sheet over him or something," Don Ross said.

After the shooting, "the police got here pretty darn quick," Don Ross said.

He said there weren't many people in the area when the shooting occurred.

Joy Docter, a Seattle resident and owner of the booth Uncle Stinky's Magic & Novelties, was in her van parked across North Chelan Avenue at the Animal Hospital of Wenatchee when the shooting began.

Dokter said she initially heard popping but it took her a while to realize the sound she was hearing was gunfire, she said.

"After the intermittent group of gunshots, all of the sudden, I heard a very violent voice," she said. "Believe me, I'm from Seattle, so we hear a lot of screaming, but this was the worst I had ever heard. After he started screaming really violently, all of a sudden, I heard a gun in a very rapid succession."

Dokter said then ducked down in her van and tried calling 911 but nobody answered so she shut her phone off.

After a couple of minutes, she said she saw a group of police officers on bicycles arrive.

"I saw the police coming, even though the gunshots were still going off, all of the policemen laid their bikes in the street," Dokter said. "They all drew their guns, and they had them pointed right at the door of the church. There was a shootout. During the shootout with the police, I ducked again, because I was really, really frightened."

This incident is being investigated by the North Central Washington Special Investigation Unit — an independent investigative team comprised of investigators from the Chelan, Douglas and Okanogan County Sheriff's Offices, East Wenatchee and Wenatchee Police Departments and the Washington State Patrol. This unit is activated because this is an officer-involved shooting incident, according to a NCWSIU news release.

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HEADLINE	05/07 Former OK cops charged in fatal shooting
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/07/us/oklahoma-lpd-officers-shooting-manslaughter.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20News
GIST	<p>Two former police officers in Lawton, Okla., were charged with first-degree manslaughter Friday in the shooting of a Black man in December. In video footage released by the city on Friday, the man, Quadry Sanders, appeared to be complying with orders to put his hands up after he was initially shot, when he was repeatedly shot again.</p> <p>The graphic body-camera video of the confrontation shows the officers Nathan Ronan and Robert Hinkle responding to a 911 call on Dec. 5, 2021, just after 8:30 p.m. about a man who was under a protective order entering the home of the person named in the order.</p>

Lee Merritt, the family's lawyer, said in a statement that Mr. Sanders had a dispute with a woman when the police were called.

Mr. Sanders, 29, was the person in violation of the protective order, according to a [statement](#) issued in December by the Lawton police chief, James T. Smith. The statement added that the caller reported that Mr. Sanders was waving a gun inside the house. Officers learned that Mr. Sanders was refusing to let one of the residents leave, according to a statement by the district attorney that was reported by the [local news station KSWO](#).

The footage shows officers using a loudspeaker to alert Mr. Sanders of their presence. A woman exits the home. Mr. Sanders then emerges from a back door according to caption text in the video. Mr. Sanders complied with an officer's commands to show his hands, according to the district attorney's office, before running back inside.

When Mr. Sanders exits the house again, the officer wearing the body camera moves toward him, directing him to put his hands up and get down on the ground. (It was not immediately known whether the footage released by the city came from Officer Ronan's body camera or Officer Hinkle's.) The only object visible in his hands is a baseball cap, according to the district attorney's statement. Mr. Sanders appears to try to move behind a refrigerator sitting outside. Just as he raises his hands above his head, one of the officers shoots at Mr. Sanders four times.

Mr. Sanders then falls to the ground, at which time an officer once again says, "Hands! Hands! Hands!" The footage then shows Mr. Sanders sitting up with his hands above his head, at which point he is shot repeatedly. According to the statement by the district attorney's office, 15 rounds were fired at Mr. Sanders overall — 11 rounds by Officer Hinkle and four rounds by Officer Ronan.

Officers shout at Mr. Sanders to "stay down" and "roll over on your stomach." Mr. Sanders, writhing, appears to say, "I'm down" and "I can't breathe."

The officers are then seen dragging Mr. Sanders's limp body from the doorway, leaving a trail of blood on the driveway. They do not begin to treat his wounds for over two minutes after firing the final shots. Mr. Sanders was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead, according to the statement from the police chief.

"I can't find a single redeemable factor that mitigates any aspect of this shooting," [Mr. Merritt wrote on Instagram](#). "It was just murder. There was no justification. These men must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Mr. Ronan and Mr. Hinkle were fired from the department on Jan. 7 after an internal investigation, which found that the officers' actions "were not in conformance with the Lawton Police Department's well-established training protocols, policies, practices, customs or procedures," according to a [statement](#) from City Manager Michael Cleghorn in January. A separate criminal investigation was conducted by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, leading the Comanche County district attorney, Kyle Cabelka, to issue charges on Friday.

The former officers each posted bail at \$25,000 on Friday. A hearing is set for Aug. 1. According to Oklahoma state sentencing guidelines, penalties for first-degree manslaughter include a minimum sentence of four years in prison.

Mr. Ronan was previously under investigation for the fatal shooting of another Black man, Zonterious Johnson, 24, in January 2021. That shooting occurred just three miles from where Mr. Sanders was shot in Lawton, a city of 90,000 a little over an hour southwest of Oklahoma City.

The district attorney's office [cleared](#) Officer Ronan of any wrongdoing in April 2021 after an Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation report, which found that Mr. Johnson had raised his gun despite Officer Ronan's command to drop the weapon. Officer Ronan had pursued Mr. Johnson after he heard shots fired

	<p>outside a local restaurant and saw Mr. Johnson standing in the street with his arm extended, and another person shooting at Mr. Johnson, according to a statement from the police chief.</p> <p>The Lawton Police Department, District Attorney Cabelka and Mr. Hinkle could not be reached for comment. Mr. Ronan declined to comment.</p> <p>“Although this decision and the releasing of information that followed may provide clarity to this tragic incident, it does not come without impacting one’s stages of grief and mourning of a lost loved one,” Stan Booker, the mayor of Lawton, said in a statement. “I believe the Lawton Police Department holds itself to the highest possible standards, and I know it will continue to do so moving forward.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/06 Fairchild: indictments stolen ammo case
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/four-more-at-fairchild-indicted-stolen-ammunition-case/293-50d20f28-a000-4fa6-9764-75206965e3a0
GIST	<p>FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. — Four more personnel based at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane County have been indicted as part of an investigation into stolen ammunition.</p> <p>Court documents name Shawn Robson, Nathaniel A. Richards, Jonah Pierce, and Austin Limacher as plaintiffs. The four were either assigned to the Combat Arms Training Managements section of the 92nd Security Forces Squadron or the Armory at Fairchild.</p> <p>They join two Sergeants, John I. Sanger and Eric A. Eagleton, who were previously arrested on charges of conspiracy to commit theft of government property, according to The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Washington.</p> <p>According to the new indictment, filed on May 3, all six “conspired” to steal military ammunition from Fairchild. The court documents leave open the possibility that more people could still be charged.</p> <p>“It was a part of the conspiracy that the Defendants, and their known and unknown conspirators, would steal military ammunition, property of the United States to which the Defendants had access by means of their military service, and provide the stolen ammunition to the known and unknown conspirators for their personal use and possession,” court documents say.</p> <p>The indictment also accused the airmen of falsifying documentation to make it look like the stolen ammunition had been used for official military use.</p> <p>The indictment indicates “approximately 14,000 rounds of assorted ammunition” was stolen.</p> <p>According to court documents, the case began with an investigation into Sanger in August of 2021. That investigation was related to two social media accounts where the user “was discussing committing acts of violence to further his political agenda.”</p> <p>The court documents say that when Sanger was asked on social media on Dec. 2, 2020 “what ‘taking our government back’ looked like, Sanger responded, ‘I think the capital (sic) needs to be seized... No trial or chance to escape.’” On Dec. 6, court documents state Sanger posted, “They defrauded our election system and are still getting away with it. That means this system has run it’s (sic) course. People have to die.”</p> <p>As part of the investigation, an active-duty USAF undercover agent was introduced to Sanger.</p> <p>In early March of 2022, court documents state that Sanger invited the undercover agent to a meetup at Fishtrap Lake shooting range. Sanger allegedly told the agent that several members of the 92nd Security Forces Squadron Combat Arms Training Management (CATM) section “regularly steal USAF ammunition.”</p>

On March 12, the agent and Sanger met up with Eagleton. Court documents say Eagleton told the agent he worked at Fairchild in the CATM section.

"Eagleton detailed stealing up to 3,000 rounds in a day and dividing the stolen ammunition between all members of the CATM section. Eagleton stated all members of the CATM section are aware of the ongoing thefts and allow it to occur," according to court documents.

After meeting up with some other people, the undercover agent said they observed three full ammunition cans.

Later in the month, the undercover agent (U/C) and Sanger exchanged text messages that court documents state detailed Sanger's plan to meet Eagleton to receive stolen ammunition from Fairchild AFB. Court documents share a portion of the text messages:

- Sanger: "Eagle (Eagleton) can hook us up with some rounds. Dude's awesome."
- U/C: "Really? How much does he want for them?"
- Sanger: "Nothing. It's stolen."
- U/C: "Seriously? Bro that's awesome. Think we can get them before Saturday's range day?"
- Sanger: "Yeah he's solid man. I'm gonna (sic) get the ammo tomorrow."

Court documents state that on March 29 agents observed Eagleton and Sanger meet in the parking lot of Northern Quest Resort and Casino. Eagleton was seen getting a military-style green ammunition can from the back of his truck and handing the can to Sanger. The meetup was also captured by casino cameras.

Later that day, Sanger texted the undercover agent. Court documents share part of the text exchange:

- Sanger: "But I got the ammo."
- U/C: "nice"
- Sanger: "5.56"
- U/C: "Green"
- Sanger: "No. No mags this time. 394."

Court documents state that Sanger also texted a photo of ammunition that resembled 5.56mm rounds.

The case is being investigated by the FBI's Seattle Field Office, Inland Northwest Joint Terrorism Task Force ("INJTTF"), and the United States Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI).

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HEADLINE	05/07 Tacoma rolling shootout ends in crash
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/investigation-underway-after-shootout-ends-with-crash-injuries/GUKYWE4R25BRPPJQC576YPI3PM/
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police are investigating a shootout between two cars that resulted in a crash and one injury.</p> <p>Police said people inside the cars were “interacting” with one another in the 1600 block of South 35th Street, exchanged gunfire and then fled.</p> <p>One car hit a corner too fast and rolled, police said. Everyone inside the car then fled on foot, except a person who suffered a gunshot wound to the lower leg. He was taken to the hospital with injuries considered to be non-life-threatening.</p> <p>Two houses and two cars nearby also were hit by bullets, but no one was injured, according to police.</p> <p>Neighbors KIRO 7 talked to about the shooting said they heard nearly 25 gunshots, then everyone fled.</p> <p>They thought everything had ended but saw a car that had rolled into a ditch.</p>

	<p>One resident said she was inside her home when she heard the chaos and called 911 after bullets struck her home.</p> <p>“I ended up with four bullet holes in my house and then a bullet came to my ceiling into my stairway. I mean, I’m glad it was raining because normally there’s little kids next door playing at that time and they would’ve been outside,” Jennifer said.</p> <p>Jennifer told KIRO 7 that her 15-year-old daughter is now scared to leave their home.</p> <p>Another neighbor talked about bullets hitting nearby cars.</p> <p>“This car got shot three times. Another car got shot once,” said Laura, who witnessed the shooting.</p> <p>Although the man who was shot and injured is expected to recover, for those in the neighborhood it might take awhile.</p> <p>“It’s indicative of what’s going on in Tacoma, it’s what going on in Pierce County. It’s what’s going on everywhere and this is not OK,” Jennifer said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/07 Sunnyside Cinco de Mayo gang shooting
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/sunnyside-cinco-de-mayo-celebration-ends-in-tragedy
GIST	<p>Yesterday at approximately 4:45 pm police say a shooting incident occurred at the City of Sunnyside Cinco de Mayo celebration.</p> <p>Police say there are currently five gunshot victims.</p> <p>One adult was shot in the leg and has been transferred to a hospital in Vancouver, WA.</p> <p>There were also four juveniles that were injured, the youngest victim 7-years-old. One juvenile male was shot in the face and is currently in surgery at Astria Sunnyside Hospital.</p> <p>Police say none of the wounds received have been described as life threatening.</p> <p>They say the shooting was gang related. At this time they believe there was a single shooter who fired multiple shots at a rival gang member within the crowd at the carnival section of the event.</p> <p>After the shooting, officers chased several juveniles on foot to a residence on the 600 block of Harrison Avenue. Officers established a blockade around the house and were assisted by Washington State Patrol, Yakima County Sheriff's Office and Yakima Regional SWAT.</p> <p>Four juveniles exited the house and surrendered prior to the arrival of SWAT. A fifth juvenile exited the house right before SWAT was going to make entry into the house. Two other juveniles were also detained in the area of the event. Police say the seven juveniles were detained that day, but have since then been released to their parents.</p> <p>A search warrant is being served at the Harrison Avenue home and at least one firearm has been recovered so far. Police say the case is still under investigation.</p> <p>Right now all Cinco de Mayo events have been cancelled in Sunnyside</p>
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HEADLINE	05/08 Oregon public defender system on the brink
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-crime-pandemics-9f479097d57a34907af8629808c46d8c

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Oregon’s public defender system has shown cracks for years, but a post-pandemic glut of delayed cases has exposed shocking constitutional landmines impacting defendants and crime victims alike in a state with a national reputation for progressive social justice.

An acute shortage of public defenders means that at any given time at least several hundred low-income criminal defendants don’t have legal representation, sometimes in serious felony cases that could put them away for years. Judges have dismissed nearly four dozen cases in the Portland area alone — among them a domestic violence case with allegations of strangulation as well as other major felonies — and have threatened to hold the state public defenders office in contempt of court for failing to provide attorneys.

Oregon sends out a weekly list of unrepresented defendants to private attorneys begging for help. Some of the accused have been jailed without a lawyer for months on charges of rape, sodomy, child sexual abuse or attempted murder, records show. Meanwhile, court proceedings for those not in custody are repeatedly pushed back, leaving defendants in limbo and the courts spinning their wheels.

“We’re overwhelmed. The pandemic is exposing all the problems that we have, the under-resourcing and the underfunding, and it just hit a breaking point,” said Carl Macpherson, executive director of Metropolitan Public Defender, a large nonprofit public defender firm in Portland that temporarily stopped taking new cases when its attorneys couldn’t keep up.

“It just became abundantly clear that we are broken. You cannot do your job when you have 130 open felony cases per attorney,” Macpherson said.

Public defenders warned that the system was on the brink of collapse before the pandemic. In 2019, some attorneys even picketed outside the state Capitol for higher pay and reduced caseloads. But lawmakers didn’t act and months later, COVID-19 shut down the courts. Now, the system is “buckling before our eyes,” said Kelly Simon, legal director for the Oregon American Civil Liberties Union, which is closely watching the situation and hasn’t ruled out litigation.

Macpherson estimates there are now about 500 defendants going without public defenders statewide and that’s likely a significant undercount, because many are initially arraigned and then have their case deferred up to 60 days with plans to appoint permanent counsel later.

“If you do not have a lawyer, then your constitutional rights are being violated from the very beginning,” he said. “But if there’s no attorney to appoint, what do you expect them to do?”

The crisis in Oregon, while extreme, reflects a nationwide reckoning on indigent defense, as courts seek to absorb a pandemic backlog of criminal cases with public defender systems that have long been underfunded and understaffed. From New England to New Mexico to Wisconsin, states are struggling to keep public defender services running amid an onslaught of cases and attorney departures.

After a lawsuit from the ACLU, lawmakers in Maine this month earmarked nearly \$1 million to hire that state’s first five public defenders, with a focus on rural counties where the system is overwhelmed. Maine until now has relied entirely on contracts with private attorneys, and many remote areas don’t have enough qualified lawyers for the work.

In New Mexico, a recent report found the state was short 600 full-time public defenders. State lawmakers in New Hampshire approved more than \$2 million in March to raise public defenders’ salaries in a state where about 800 defendants were without attorneys. Three dozen public defenders resigned in the 2021 fiscal year due to low pay and high caseloads, the state Judicial Council said.

And in Wisconsin, where starting pay for public defenders is \$27 an hour, there’s a shortage of 60 attorney positions statewide while one-third of the private attorneys who contract out for cases have quit the system, according to authorities there.

“This is America’s dirty little secret: Thousands of people in courtrooms all across the country go to jail every single day without having talked to a lawyer,” said Jon Mosher, deputy director of the Sixth Amendment Center, which studies state public defender systems, [including Oregon’s](#), and advocates for reforms.

“We see it all over the place. It happens in upstate New York, it happens in Mississippi. It’s everywhere.”

In Oregon, [a report by the American Bar Association](#) released in January found the state has 31% of the public defenders it needs. Every existing attorney would have to work more than 26 hours a day during the work week to cover the caseload, the authors said.

The situation is more complicated than in other states because Oregon’s public defender system is the only one in the nation that relies entirely on contractors, Mosher said. Cases are doled out to either large nonprofit defense firms, smaller cooperating groups of private defense attorneys that contract for cases or independent attorneys who can take cases at will.

Now, some of those large nonprofit firms are periodically refusing to take new cases because of the overload. Private attorneys — they normally serve as a relief valve where there are conflicts of interest — are increasingly also rejecting new clients because of the workload, poor pay rates and late payments from the state.

For victims, the situation is devastating and it’s hurting the most vulnerable the hardest.

Cassie Trahan, co-founder and executive director of an Oregon nonprofit that works with teen and young adult victims of sex trafficking, said trust in the judicial system is fading amid minority and immigrant communities and the young people with whom she works. Victims no longer want to come forward when they see cases being dismissed or ending in weak plea bargains to reduce pressure on the courts.

One such young woman who is a victim in a pending trafficking case “lives in constant fear that it’s going to be dismissed,” Trahan said.

Prosecutors can get an indictment from a grand jury when cases are dismissed for lack of a public defender and police will re-arrest the alleged perpetrator, but that’s small consolation to victims.

“In her mind, it’s like, ‘Now I’ve outed myself, now I’ve talked against him and what’s going to happen if he gets off?’” Trahan said of the victim. “That’s what we’re seeing more of, especially in communities of color and groups that don’t trust the judicial system anyway.”

Other victims’ advocates say that even when cases aren’t dismissed, they are taking much longer because hearings are constantly pushed back and trials delayed. Victims can’t move on because “you need to keep your testimony fresh ... and there’s so much emotional preparedness that comes with that,” said Jessica Mindlin, director of the Oregon office of the Victim Rights Law Center, which provides free legal help to rape and sexual assault survivors.

Amid the crisis, the state Legislature passed \$12.8 million in one-time funding for the state to hire 36 new public defenders in the four hardest-hit counties, as well as a suite of legislation to reform the state’s public defender agency. New contracts to be finalized in July will institute lower attorney case caps and lawmakers are withholding \$100 million from the agency’s budget until it shows good faith on numerous reforms, including a restructuring, financial audits and performance metrics.

A working group of all three branches of state government will convene this month to begin tackling deeper reforms.

“It’s horrifying. I don’t I don’t want to mince words about this. I am not going to make excuses for this. It’s awful. I think it’s unconstitutional and I think it’s incredibly problematic,” said state Sen. Elizabeth

Steiner Hayward, who co-chairs the state Legislature's Ways and Means committee. "That being said, we can't manufacture attorneys out of thin air."

Autumn Shreve, government relations manager for the state's Office of Public Defense Services, said the pandemic finally forced the hand of state lawmakers who haven't taken a close look at public defenders in nearly 20 years.

"It's been a rag-tag group of people trying to cover the caseloads year to year and because of that there's been a lot of past papering over of problems, of just keeping the ship floating and not really being thoughtful about how the money is being spent," she said.

"We're working really hard," she said. "We very much appreciate the attention and the help that all the branches of government want to provide, because we haven't always gotten that."

Meanwhile, the situation in the state's courtrooms and jails is dire. Often those going without attorneys are charged with heinous crimes that come with hefty prison sentences if convicted, making it even harder to find public defenders qualified to handle such complex cases in an overtaxed system.

And those who handle misdemeanor charges are often young attorneys carrying 100 cases or more at a time — and they also spend hours helping clients access mental health or drug treatment services and keeping their family informed.

"You can't keep everything in your head when you have that many clients at the same time. Even things like, you know, 'What's your current plea offer?' I can't remember that for 100 people. Or I can't remember, 'What exactly does the police report say?' said Drew Flood, a public defender with just eight months on the job at Metropolitan Public Defender.

"This is the scariest thing they have going on in their life," he said. "It's hard when those people, you can tell, don't think you're giving their case the time and attention it deserves — and I feel that way too, sometimes."

Other public defender services funded by the state, including private investigators and legal advisors, have also reached a breaking point.

Renardo Mitchell, who is jailed on attempted murder charges, said he chose to represent himself after he didn't hear from his public defender for five months. But his state-provided legal adviser — an attorney assigned by the court to help self-representing defendants hire expert witnesses and file motions — died unexpectedly in February and he's been without legal counsel since then.

Two years after his arrest, he still hasn't seen all the discovery in his case, said Mitchell, 37.

"We're all innocent until proven guilty. Nothing has been proven yet — I haven't been found guilty," said Mitchell, who faces more than 22 years in prison if convicted on all charges. "Even if I did those things that they allege, I still have a right to due process of law. Period."

In a surprising twist, the chief prosecutor in Portland has become an outspoken advocate of public defender reform for that very reason.

Multnomah County District Attorney Michael Schmidt recently penned an editorial in The Oregonian/OregonLive saying a lack of public defenders is hurting public safety, taxing an already overworked police force and re-traumatizing victims.

"The most important thing is everybody has a right to an attorney, it's a constitutional right. There's a reason why we don't want to win every single case that we bring. That's what protects everybody, that protects me and that protects you because the government unchecked has a lot of power," Schmidt told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

	“It’s an ecosystem, like a coral reef. If you take away one aspect of this system, then all the other aspects fall apart,” Schmidt said. “I can’t do my job without everyone else doing theirs.”
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HEADLINE	05/06 Canada plane crash murder conspiracy?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/06/canada-plane-crash-murder-conspiracy
GIST	<p>A plane crash in the rugged hinterlands of Canada during seemingly calm weather has prompted a federal investigation into what could have brought down the small aircraft.</p> <p>But revelations that two of the passengers were fleeing murder and conspiracy charges and had links to organized crime have only deepened the mystery over the doomed flight.</p> <p>Over the weekend, rescue crews dispatched a search plane and two helicopters to scour the boreal forest of north-western Ontario, after reports of a plane that never arrived at its intended destination.</p> <p>On Saturday, the debris of a small aircraft, a four-seater Piper PA-28 Cherokee, was discovered near the town of Sioux Lookout, guided by the plane’s emergency locator beacon. Neither the pilot, Abhinav Handa, nor the three passengers survived the crash.</p> <p>Among those onboard the plane was Gene Lahrkamp, one of the most wanted men in the country with a C\$100,000 (US\$78,000) bounty on his head, according to the combined forces special enforcement unit of British Columbia.</p> <p>Lahrkamp, a former soldier was a chief suspect in the murder of gang member Jimi Sandhu, who was shot dead while at a villa in Phuket in February.</p> <p>Sandhu, was born in India but raised in the British Columbia city of Abbotsford, where he joined the United Nations gang. He was deported to India in 2016 by Canadian authorities for “serious criminality”, and arrested there two years later for his role in a ketamine manufacturing operation.</p> <p>Thai police allege that Lahrkamp and co-conspirator Matthew Dupre, another former soldier, travelled to Thailand to kill Sandhu, whose body was found riddled with bullets.</p> <p>Thai police say they dressed in hooded sweatshirts and face coverings for the attack, fleeing for Canada two days after the shooting.</p> <p>Sandhu’s death marks the second recent shooting of a Canadian-linked gang member abroad. In January, two Toronto men linked to the Hells Angels were killed near the resort city of Playa del Carmen in Mexico.</p> <p>Dupre was arrested by Canadian police in late February and is awaiting extradition. An Interpol red notice for Lahrkamp warned he may be armed and dangerous, as well as possibly suicidal.</p> <p>Also onboard the plane was Duncan Bailey, another alleged gang member, who was facing charges of conspiracy to commit murder over a 2020 shooting in Vancouver. An arrest warrant was issued for Bailey in late April after prosecutors in British Columbia say he breached his bail conditions.</p> <p>The fourth person on the plane was identified as Hankun Hong, a resident of British Columbia. It is unclear if he was a co-pilot on the flight or a passenger. Images from his Facebook page show the 27-year-old piloting a small aircraft in western British Columbia.</p> <p>The plane left the province on 23 April, making frequent refuelling stops as it travelled east. The plane departed the town of Dryden, Ontario, on Friday, 29 April evening and was due to land in the town of Marathon, roughly 700 kilometres away.</p>

	Officials have not yet said if they know where the plane was headed after its stop in Marathon, but the Ontario provincial police say they are conducting a criminal investigation into the flight and the possible links between passengers.
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HEADLINE	05/07 'Racist rhetoric' by Pierce Co. prosecutor
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article260653487.html
GIST	<p>Andre McKenzie's 2019 conviction for attempted child rape and communication with a minor for immoral purposes fell apart because of two words: "gorilla pimp."</p> <p>The sex-trafficking term, invoked by Pierce County deputy prosecutor John Neeb during McKenzie's trial, recently prompted a trio of state appeals court judges to reverse his conviction and six-year prison sentence.</p> <p>While the words are familiar at street level, they didn't belong in court, according to the Division III panel's unanimous opinion, issued April 21.</p> <p>"Racist rhetoric has no place in our justice system," wrote Judge Rebecca Pennell. "It is hurtful, thwarts due process, and undermines the rule of law."</p> <p>Neeb, who voluntarily retired from the prosecutor's office in February after 30 years of service, said in a recent interview that he did not use the term in a racial context.</p> <p>"I have never once injected racial overtones into a trial, and I didn't do it in McKenzie," he said.</p> <p>The appeals court disagreed.</p> <p>"At this point in our history, we should not have to belabor the point that using a gorilla analogy when discussing human behavior, specifically the behavior of a Black man, is clearly racist rhetoric," the opinion stated.</p> <p>McKenzie, 32, was arrested in 2018 along with 20 other men as part of a "Net Nanny" operation conducted by the State Patrol. He exchanged text messages with a detective posing as an underage girl then drove from Seattle to meet her in Puyallup, intending to have sex, according to court records.</p> <p>While the victim did not exist, McKenzie's intent led to the charges. A jury convicted him in December 2019.</p> <p>"No witness had used this terminology and the issue of pimping had minimal relevance," the opinion states. "The only purpose served by referencing the gorilla pimp concept was to tap into deep seated racial prejudice by comparing Black human beings to primates. The State cannot prove that this racist rhetoric was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt."</p> <p>In arguments preceding the court's decision, Pierce County's appellate attorneys contended that misspelling was part of the issue, and that the trial transcripts should have said "guerrilla pimp" when referencing the trafficking terminology. Both spellings appear in online sources, though the "guerrilla" spelling is less common.</p> <p>"Gorillas don't speak," Neeb said in a recent interview. "Guerrillas do. The guerrilla pimp uses terrorist tactics and brute force. It's just wrong that this is a term that references an animal."</p> <p>The appellate court opinion called the spelling argument "unconvincing," and added, "A reasonable person listening to Detective Rodriguez would understand his description of a gorilla pimp to be related to animal-like behavior, not the activity of some military combatant."</p>

	Pierce County Prosecutor Mary Robnett retains the option to appeal the decision to the state Supreme Court. That won't happen, spokesperson Adam Faber said: "Even before (the) decision, our office has been training deputy prosecutors on avoiding this type of language. Appeals courts are making clear that they find certain language and arguments by prosecutors to be prejudicial. After the decision was issued, our appellate team leader put out a bulletin to all deputy prosecutors highlighting the ruling and again instructing them on not using terms like this. We do not plan to appeal this ruling."
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